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INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT TRANSFER STUDENT SUCCESS AT A
UNIVERSITY IN THE MID-SOUTH REGION OF THE U.S.

A Companion Dissertation in Practice
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Higher Education
The University of Mississippi

by

Patricia A. Coats

December 2019

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ABSTRACT

At a four-year university located in the Mid-South region of the United States, students who transfer do so with the likelihood of spending more time and money completing a baccalaureate degree than non-transfer students. This is what research scholar Kevin Dougherty (1992) entitled the Baccalaureate Attainment Gap or the *transfer gap*. In this companion dissertation, using a multi-method approach, we use the quantitative data of transfer student graduation and retention rates along with qualitative data from interviews conducted with administrative staff about transfer student success. We consider these selected outcomes and administrative staff interviews to be institutional factors that help shape the transfer gap. Framed using the student departure theory, enactment theory, and critical race theory, we contend that these institutional factors affect transfer student success.

The overall summary of data confirms that the 4-year graduation rates examined in this Dissertation in Practice indicate that transfer students are graduating on average at a higher percentage of 64.4% on MSU regional campuses. There are fewer transfer student resources on the regional campuses than the Mid-South Central campus that graduates on average of 60.0 % transfer students.

Regional campuses are showing the highest 4-year graduation rate of 70.5% during cohort 2014. MSU central and regional campuses 4-year graduation rates are elevated to 64.0% when averages are combined.

DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this dissertation to our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, who made this aspiration a reality.

I want to thank our Assistant Provost, who is the leader for Regional Education in Outreach, Dr. Rick Gregory, who was instrumental in inspiring and believing in me that I could complete this doctoral program. Today his vision and my aspiration have been achieved. To my remarkable son, Mr. Doug Easterwood, whom I love to infinity, I finished this doctoral degree for you and I. Thank you for your prayers, love, and support during this season of my life.

There are numerous noteworthy people I want to thank, they are: my sister Mrs. Telisa Mabin-Davis, brother Mr. Kenneth Coats, Aunt Mildred Green, Dr. Mary Perkins-Jacobs, Ms. Kail Adams, Ms. Dora Rivers, colleagues, friends, and family who consistently prayed and supported me during this time. Finally, I want to thank my inspiring noteworthy higher education mentors Dr. Charlotte Cone and Dr. Fannye Love, for their loving support and prayers. Thank you all for being a part of my village.

This dissertation is in honor of my deceased parents John Mabin and Lorene Coats-Mabin, who taught me to trust and have faith in God. They taught me to have a good work ethic, and they showed me through prayer and belief in God that I can persevere when life gets tough. I utilized these skills through this entire process. Today, I know they both are smiling proudly concerning this achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank the dissertation chair Dr. Neal Hutchens and co-chair Dr. Whitney Webb and committee members, Dr. Katie Busby and Dr. Amanda Windburn, for serving on the committee.

Dr. Hutchens, without your guidance, intelligence, and support, this dissertation would not have been possible. I appreciate you checking in on me when I grew weary and was missing in action. I will be forever grateful for your leadership from the beginning to the conclusion of this dissertation in practice. Dr. Webb, I cannot say enough about your knowledge and your sound advice and responses during the writing process of this dissertation. You kept my focus, and you were also instrumental and inspirational in guiding me through this finale. Dr. Busby, thank you for your guidance from the beginning and the ending of this academic undertaking. You gave me clear guidelines on how to determine the type of data I needed to complete this research study. You also revealed to me how to disclose the data so that everyone reading this study could comprehend the outcomes. Again, thank you, Dr. Winburn, for your support in serving on the final defense committee.

Elizabeth Moore, my companion researcher, we honed in on some valuable skills throughout this journey, such as organization, persistence, achievement, time management, dependability, and how to encourage each other along the way. I thank you for your friendship and being a team player during the progressions of this Dissertation in Practice journey. As the higher education landscape evolves, I pray for your continued success as a life long learner.

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MANUSCRIPT ONE

INTRODUCTION

Institutional factors in higher education are the characteristics, traditions, and policies within an organization that influence administrators, staff, students, finances, campus events, etc. Transfers are defined as students who have earned credits at one institution or more, but for a variety of reasons decide to go to a different institution and transfer those earned credits. For many transfer students, the decision to transfer can result in higher costs, and additional time spent earning a bachelor's degree than those who entered a four-year institution after completion of high school (Dougherty, 1992). This dilemma – the transfer gap, is what Kevin Dougherty (1992) addressed in his work on the Baccalaureate Attainment Gap.

In this companion dissertation, we triangulate the insights gained from data related to community college and university selected outcomes for transfer students with the insights of administrative staff perceptions of transfer students. We frame our research using the enactment theory (Weick, 1995) coupled with critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Hiraldo, 2010) to help explain the relationship between institutional factors and their impact on transfer student success.

We selected a four-year institution and one of its regional campuses, which are both located in the Mid-South region of the United States, to conduct our research. From here forward, we will refer to the university as Mid-South University (MSU) and its regional campus as the Mid-South Regional Campus. We will focus on transfers' classic route to earning a bachelor degree called the vertical transfer (Baker, 2016).

A vertical transfer student is one who attends a two-year institution before moving to attend a four-year institution. The context and rationale for the study are explained. A reflective statement from each author is provided to allow insight into the standpoints that inform this study. Followed is a review of literature that focuses on the institutional factors of higher education and the effects upon transfer student success. Our reliance on multiple data sources and analytical methods is described. Next, we present findings and ethical considerations before concluding.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The United States has historically deep roots in school segregation. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was enacted to abolish slavery and involuntary servitude, with an exception to punishment for a crime. The Fourteenth Amendment was enacted in 1868 that defined all people born in the U.S. as citizens required due process of law, and required equal protection to all people (Wells, 2001).

The Fifteenth Amendment, enacted in 1870, gave citizens voting rights irrespective of their race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Southern and border states of the United States enacted Jim Crow laws and enforced them between 1876 and 1965 to subvert the goals of the Reconstruction Amendments. Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in the American South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. These laws continue to affect Mid-South University today (Wells, 2001). Mid-South University is a predominately White institution (PWI) where transfer students made up 24% of the total student body in Fall 2014 (Mid-South Transfer Task Force report, 2015). Of the total transfer student population; Mid-South University reported that the majority of transfer students were predominantly White (71%) and male.

Mid-South University Regional locations enrolled more transfers who were older, female, Black and residents of the state (Mid-South Transfer Task Force report, 2015). Well established are theories (e.g., Lazarowicz, 2015) that attribute the transfer gap to the fact that transfer students are women, older, poorer, more often non-White, less academically prepared, and less likely to attend college full-time due to work or family commitments than their counterparts.

However, when compared to four-year entrants with the same traits and characteristics, the College Board (2011) found that transfer students were still less likely to attain a bachelor degree. Dougherty (1992) explains that while the traits and characteristics of transfer students are essential factors in the transfer gap, they do not provide a complete picture. We should also consider institutional factors such as the loss of earned credit and administrative staff perceptions. There are many studies on loss of earned credit and perceptions from a transfer student perspective. (e.g., Giani, 2019, Tobolowsky & Bers, 2019, Hodara, Martinez-Wenzl, Stevens & Mazzeo, 2017, Jason, 1992). However, few studies (e.g., McGowan & Gawley, 2006) have conducted interviews gathering the perspective of administrative staff.

Today, most students in the United States attend more than one institution in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Nearly 50% of the entire U.S. undergraduate population in 2014 enrolled in a two-year college initially (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Eighty percent of those students expressed a desire to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree. As more students transfer each year, this population has become an important initiative for many four-year institutions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To help understand the connection between the institutional factors and transfer student success, we turn to enactment theory. Using the theoretical perspective of enactment theory we

argue that Mid-South University organizational environment is unfit for transfer students, thereby, exacerbating the transfer gap. Karl Weick's (1995) *enactment theory* focuses on the cognitive process that the organization's members experience in their attempt to understand a great deal of information on a daily basis (Weick, 1995).

Members' cognitive process offer common ways of defining, thinking, and describing how things ought to be in an organization (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). Weick (1995) stated that the importance of the enactment theory is that it provides a link between members' cognitive processes and the organizational environment. According to Smircich and Stubbart (1985), there are two tenets to members' cognitive processes in an organizational environment. First, members organize information in terms of the pre-existing schema. Schemas are defined as a pattern of thought or behavior that organizes categories of information and the relationships among them (Morgan & Lindsey, 2008). Second, members schemas are embedded, meaning that these patterns of thinking become permanent and noticeable.

For example, members first enter an academic institution with a schema that transfer students are second-rated. Second, members' schemas become evident through their remarks or actions related to transfer students. These remarks or actions collectively can reflect the transfer student experience within the academic institution or organizational environment.

However, one persistent criticism of enactment theory is Weick's neglect in applying the role of social and historical contexts in the organizational environment (McGowan & McDaniel, 1980). Mid-South is a university where symbols of White supremacy are regularly displayed. Given this social and historical context, our analysis needed a further detailed explanation of the thought patterns of organizational members; so, where enactment theory stops, *critical race theory* (CRT) begins.

CRT (Crenshaw, 1995; Hiraldo, 2010) analyzes the role of race and racism in U.S. society. CRT identifies five principles believed to have the ability to change the relationship between white supremacy and marginalized people of color in society (Hiraldo, 2010). First, *counter-storytelling* is legitimizing stories told from marginalized perspectives. When we consider the official record of representation in our society and nation, we are likely to see stories that are dominated by white voices. Counter-storytelling is a concerted effort to empower historically marginalized communities to tell their own stories, shape the public narrative, and assert influence over matters that concern them. Second, the *permanence of racism* means that racism is static, a common practice in doing business, and an everyday experience for people of color. For example, Plessy v. Ferguson upheld laws of racial segregation for public facilities (e.g., hospitals, schools, police departments, parks, and churches) as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality.

Third, *whiteness as property*, a tenet that states U.S. law recognized and privileged rights of Whites and subordinated Blacks based on race (Hiraldo, 2010). For example, Lum v. Rice of 1927 is a landmark decision that upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation of a child of Chinese ancestry from a state high school. Examples such as this show how White Supremacy became a resource to be utilized at the institutional level to maintain a racial hierarchy (Hiraldo, 2010). A fourth principle is the *interest conversion*, which holds that Whites will support rights for others only when they benefit as well (Hilrado, 2010).

For example, affirmative action was a law implemented to benefit members of a disadvantaged group that has previously suffered discrimination. Research shows that the biggest benefactors of affirmative action are White women (Hiraldo, 2010). Consequently, White men benefit from affirmative action as well.

Finally, we have a *critique of liberalism* in which CRT scholars espouse that liberalism is too passive in the approach to racism (Hiraldo, 2010). While liberalism acknowledges CRT, liberalists believe racial justice will happen naturally, not by talking about it or enforcing the policy. The enactment theory provides this study with an explanation of the day-to-day coordination by individual members within an institution, and critical race theory explains why the two concepts we believe pair well in our study.

Transfer Student Retention and Graduation Rates at a Four-Year public University

Since the 1990's the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) has collected and published graduation rates for colleges and universities around the country (Jones, 2017). These rates were based on traditional college students and first time, full degree-or certificate-seeking undergraduate students who generally, enrolled right after high school (Jones, 2017). The data is insightful; some have argued the first-time full-time graduation rate only provides part of the picture because it doesn't consider non-traditional students, including those who are part-time students and transfers. This is important because, over the past decade the number of non-traditional students outpaced the increase in traditional students, most driven by growth in those who have transferred schools (Jones, 2017). The new IPEDS Outcome Measures survey was designed to help answer these changes. One of the new student groups that will be added to the equation is a non-first time student, also known as transfer-in students, who enrolled full-time (Jones, 2017). We will discuss the MSU institutional data regarding the non-first time students which we will refer to as full time transfer students in this research.

Transfer students are doing better than their peers at almost all types of schools, but especially at public colleges and universities. The NCES report measures how many students who enrolled in 2008 had earned a degree or certificate in eight years (Wermund, 2017). Sixty-

six percent of students who transferred into a public four-year university and attended full time had earned a degree or certificate within eight years (Wermund, 2017).

There were fewer than 59 percent of full-time students who started at those same public four-year universities who graduated. Many public universities have articulation agreements with community colleges to encourage these transfer students to complete a bachelor's degree (Wermund, 2017). "What you are seeing here is that it is working," said Richard Reeves, the chief of the Postsecondary Branch at NCES (Wermund, 2017, p. 1).

In this companion dissertation, we discuss the full-time transfer student attrition rate using retention and graduation rates at the Mid-South University campuses. Retention rates measure the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall (NCES, 2019). Graduation rate measures the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who complete their program at the same institution within a specified period (e.g., 2, 4 or 6-year graduation rates) (NCES, 2019). First, we will examine the chosen outcomes for transfer students at MSU, specifically graduation and retention rates that Mid-South University faces with retaining the transfer students. Secondly, both 4-year full-time transfer student graduation rates are compared to 6-year first time freshman rates on the central campus.

Administrative Staff Perceptions

Authors and scholars have limited research on the administrative staff perceptions at four-year institutions regarding transfer students.

Administrative staff perceptions of transfer students at a four-year institution would be insightful since it is the administrative staff that makes initial contact with transfer students. Investigating

administrative staff members' perceptions of transfer students at a four-year institution will provide some perspective on institutional factors affecting transfer students.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is the purpose of this study to find out what it means to be a transfer student at Mid- South University and the perceptions of administrative staff that work with transfer students. So we ask the following questions:

1. What are the chosen outcomes for transfer students attending Mid-South Public University (MSU) campuses? Specifically, the study examines the following results:
 - a. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University central campus?
 - b. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time transfer students who enter the Mid-South University regional campuses?
 - c. What are the 2 and 4-year collective graduation rates for full-time transfer students who either attend the Mid-South central or a regional campus?
 - d. What are the first-semester retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - e. What are the second-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - f. What are the third-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses
2. What are the 4 and 6-year graduation rates of full-time first-time studnets and the 6-year graduation rates of new students who enter the Mid-South University Central campus? How do the 6-year cohort graduation rates of transfer students between regional campuses compare?

3. What are administrative staff perceptions of transfer students and Mid-South University's commitment to transfer students?

PRACTITIONER STATEMENTS

Coats Practitioner Statement

I began my career working in a corporate business environment in the areas of both Dallas and Chicago. During those twenty-six years, I went about my daily undertaking at work, motivating younger people who performed menial job tasks to enroll in college and earn a degree so that they could become more marketable in the workforce.

I encouraged them because they had access to free financial support to help them earn a college degree, which was not afforded to others. In earlier years, the corporation paid for its employees to attend college and receive a degree that would benefit the company. Additionally, the employee would perfect and learn more valuable skills to utilize in their professional growth.

I also developed a high school mentoring program at my church to assist in preparing the young people in applying for ACT/SAT entrance exams and supporting their parents in filling out Financial Aid forms for their teens to enroll in college. I have always wanted to help those in my family and community. I was born in the delta of Northeast Arkansas and I saw a need for this type of assistance after I left to go to college and begin my career. My experience is what compelled me to become a practitioner in higher education.

I wanted to move my mentoring into a career. So, I applied to several colleges and universities as an academic advisor. Unfortunately, an interview never afforded itself to me in the educational institution after an exasperating two years. A few years later, I spoke to a few friends who worked in higher education about how to gain employment in that organization. They suggested that I return to an educational institution and apply for a higher education master's degree. It is essential to mention that I had not attended school in twenty plus years.

Fear entered my mind and left me wondering whether I could compete with a younger generation of students who will be enrolled in the higher education cohort. Two years later, I still had the desire to assist teens and young adults in applying to college and earn a degree. At this point, I decided to return to the university while continuing to work in a corporate role, full-time, to obtain a master's degree in higher education.

After starting the higher education program, I applied for and received an advising job at the university a year later. My role as an advisor was to mentor 450 students who were enrolled in one or more remedial or college prep courses. Mentoring these students meant that I mandated each one of them to sign an academic agreement to meet with me five times a semester, visit the writing center and math lab and make at least two visits to their professors. I encouraged these procedures with the students so that they could raise their scholastic bar.

I smile when I see these students or when they find me on Facebook; they tell me that if it were not for me, they would have failed in college. The students that I have counseled also mention that I gave them the support and encouragement they needed to complete their degree. I saw myself in these students because of my experiences growing up in the Arkansas Delta.

Students always thank me for guiding them through their first couple of years of their college transition. It is a humbling feeling as a practitioner to know that you assisted in helping students access resources that will contribute to their upward mobility for themselves and their families. Making a difference in another person's life is both rewarding and fulfilling.

Once I completed the master's degree program, I moved on to another university and became a Director of Advising. I had the desire to help make decisions for the students I mentored and counseled on a bigger scale.

A few years later, I found myself at one of the Mid-South University regional campuses, where I advised adult transfer students. Advising adult students was a daunting task because I could not fully understand the transfer student difficulty. I often questioned myself why I took the position to work with adult learners. Ultimately, I left two jobs working with first-year students and sophomores.

However, it left me with a desire to gain a better understanding of how transfer students operate in the higher education structure. In my journey to learn more about this different population, I needed first to expose and understand my assumptions.

My assumptions and reservations about community college originated when I was employed in the corporate world. I felt that community college education was of less value than a public four-year institution. I also viewed instructors who did not have doctorates as the only ones who taught at community colleges. I thought community college was for students who could not gain admission into a four-year university.

I also assumed that community colleges did not advise well and prepare students for a four-year university. I perceived this was the reason it took some students three to four years to complete a community college degree. During my first year of working on a regional campus, I realized how my perceptions of a community college were wrong and so far from the truth.

Looking back as a practitioner, it probably took me four to six months to embrace the new population of transfer adult students. I began to place myself in their position by reminding myself that I, too, returned to the educational scene as an adult.

I was afraid, single, and working a full-time job with a teenage son. Once I viewed myself through those lenses, I was compelled to give my best to help these adult transfer students transition successfully at the Mid-South University regional campus. I treat every transfer

student as a first-year because they are entering a new institution with a new set of policies for the first time. As a practitioner, I realize I am working in an educational setting to support the students through the university's processes. Transferring to a new college or university can be a daunting obstacle to a transfer student.

Both the administrative staff and professors automatically assume that these transfer students should acclimate to the four-year institution effortlessly because they are juniors and have already attended college. Over the past six years, I have seen that this transition is not a stress-free progression for them.

As a practitioner, I want to assist with creating a seamless process by improving the collaboration between the incoming student and the institution from which they are transferring. Accessibility to a bachelor's degree should not be a disheartening process for transfer students. I desire to be a part of the transfer student's upward mobility and degree completion. While researching the transfer student experience, I recognize the potential my biases can have on the results; my intention is not to allow my beliefs to influence the quantitative data interpretation.

Moore's Practitioner Statement

An exploration of how my identity informs my research is significant to the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) program design-concept. The development of the scholar as a practitioner is a pillar of the CPED program.

In this practitioner statement, my primary goal is to identify myself within the context of this study. This is done by differentiating layers that define me personally, professionally, and as a researcher. Identification of these layers is helpful in thinking about the multiple roles a scholar-practitioner assumes and the connections between my experience, position, and research.

Concerning this study, there are identifiable layers: faculty, brown, first-generation, low-income, and transfer student. First, being a faculty member, my objective is to engage and challenge students in their skill and knowledge. The ability to help a student push beyond boundaries is what motivates my instruction. As a brown faculty member, I come into contact with brown students, non-transfer and transfer daily and often hear about the challenges they face in a predominantly White institution. Given that I was a first-generation transfer student and fourthly from a low-income background like the majority of transfer students, I can relate to this population in terms of their desire to do well academically for a better future.

Finally, my experience as a transfer student shaped me in ways that were unknown until I entered the world of business. Academically, in high school, I was an average student, although as a basketball player, I was superior. At the beginning of my junior year in high school, I was offered a full scholarship to a four-year university. In the last game of the season, I was injured. This injury required surgery and recovery was more than a year. I did not play basketball in my senior year and the scholarship offer was rescinded.

My options for attending college were few after my injury. I was depending on playing sports to pay my way through college given my low socioeconomic background. My rehabilitation was successful, and I decided to go to a community college where I could play basketball again. As a student-athlete in community college, I knew my skills in sport would help me transfer to a four-year institution. When I entered the community college system, I was met with great support, mostly because I was an athlete. Our entire team was given specialized, academic advisors. We were provided with housing, summer jobs, and transportation.

Academically, I did better in those two years than I did in my entire high school career. During my sophomore season I was offered a scholarship to a four-year university. There were

no problems with me transferring. The same level of support with a few key differences, however, was encountered. Playing a sport at that level required more time dedicated to learning team concepts and less financial assistance. At the university, I was not allowed to work. I was required to work out twice a day and meet with coaches once a day. Sport became more of a chore, and I began to struggle academically. At the end of my junior basketball season, I decided not to play and focus on completing my degree.

It was not long after my departure from the university's basketball program that the reality of being a transfer student with little to no support hit. First, academically, I was still considered a sophomore. The university did not accept all my course credits. According to my academic counselor, I was entering as an out-of-state transfer student. Secondly, the cost of housing and food were the same as the cost of tuition. So, I took on a part-time job and moved into a cheaper place. While this resolved some issues, it brought about others. My apartment was farther from campus. Transportation to campus, work, and back home was difficult. After a year passed, I decided that the amount of debt I had accrued was not worth going to school full-time. I dropped out of two classes. It would take me almost three years to complete my degree.

When I finally did graduate, the U.S. economy was in an economic decline. A friend that I worked with suggested I pursue a master's degree. It was a visit to the dean of graduate school that changed everything. It is the dean who not only encouraged me, but she also became an advocate for me. The dean helped me navigate graduate school. I credit her with making me aware of a fellowship that helped pay my tuition while in graduate school. My fellowship required that I teach three courses.

As a graduate teaching assistant, I was trained to teach basic college courses. Another benefit was that I no longer had to work a part-time job. While in graduate school I became an

advocate in the associated student government. I ran for graduate senator and won. I used my platform to support graduate student funding. Through the student government association, graduate students received financial assistance in attending conferences and other research activities. After graduation, it was through a United Nations program that I taught overseas in South America. I helped design a primary school curriculum in Chile. Inadvertently, I found that learning another language and a different educational system set me apart from other recent graduates in a unique way.

When I arrived back in the United States, the opportunities for jobs were many. I am now entering my fifth year as a full-time faculty member. Obtaining my master's degrees was made possible through the support of my graduate school dean and the fellowship award. It is for these reasons amongst others that I chose to study transfer student success. The university has made significant improvements to help transfer students, but these improvements are not adequately accomplishing the task.

As co-authors, we will concentrate systematically on the information presented at every step of the research process. We will triangulate our procedures. We will compare coding categories between field notes and interviews for consistency. These steps will enhance the confirm ability and credibility of our data analysis.

CPED STATEMENT

The transfer population of undergraduate students is an underrepresented individual. Transfer undergraduates are women, minorities, parents, and low socio-economic individuals. These populations of students represent our problem of practice (PoP) when describing the CPED principles of equity, ethics, and social justice. Transfer students still face many challenges in transferring to a four-year university to complete a baccalaureate degree. Many of

their obstacles come in the form of financial barriers, obstacles to academic success, and retention. Only one-third of all transfer students who enter a four-year university complete their degree.

Institutional reporting to the U.S. Department of Education requires universities to include overall graduation rates broken down by ethnicity, gender, and race. When determining higher education appropriations, more than half of all states take into account graduation performance data. The use of completion rates, as the primary measure for accountability, puts pressure on universities to improve student outcomes. However, university advocates have resisted the use of completion rates as a normative goal. They argue that many factors can create barriers to transfer student completion of a baccalaureate degree that is beyond the control of the university, such as academic preparation.

Most two-year colleges have an open enrollment policy; no one is turned away for previous academic failure from a previous institution. Students who attend community college are generally less selective and less academically astute. Working with the university on solutions to transfer students' success would fulfill the CPED promise of creating equity in higher education institutions. As scholarly practitioners, this dissertation in practice will guide you as a reader through the complex issues that college transfer students endure while in matriculation to a four-year public university located in the mid-southern region of the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Attrition and performance of a Transfer Student

College transfer students are students that transfer between and amongst different types of institutions (Fredrickson, 1998). However, most of the literature on “transfer students” is on community college transfers to “senior” institutions (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013-2014). In 2016, nearly 2 million (37 percent) entering undergraduates began their postsecondary education at community colleges, a number that trailed behind public 4-year institutions, which enrolled 43 percent of entering students (Snyder, Brey, & Dillow, 2018). Although 77 percent of community college transfer students expect to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher eventually, only 11 percent complete this goal within six years (Simone, 2014). Transferring is an essential step to the successful completion of a bachelor’s degree for community college students. It has become the focus of national success initiatives aimed at improving student supports and articulation agreements (Xu, Xiaotao, & Fink, 2018). This research confirms that community colleges are an accessible transfer gateway to achieving a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year university.

McGuire & Belcheir (2013-2014) stated that there are countless factors associated with transfer student success, such as student characteristics and experiences as well as institutional variables. The student characteristics of prior academic performance and first semester GPAs are the strongest predictors of college student persistence and graduation, regardless of institutional types (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). More specifically, the low incoming grade point averages (GPAs) indicate that there is a need for remediation of students with low retention rates (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013-2014).

Many students experience a low first semester GPA when they transfer compared to their previous academic performance (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2010). While prior academic

performance is associated with first semester GPA and persistence, there are no current studies that explain variations within those profiles. In other words, students with similar entering characteristics may have different levels of performance and persistence (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013-2014).

Institutional variables include both the structure of the institution and the perceptions students have on the institution. For instance, students reported feeling less academically connected to the receiving four-year institution than the community college from which they transferred. They stated that there were fewer interactions with the faculty, fewer opportunities to join clubs, and confusing transfer policies (McGuire & Belcheir, 2013-2014).

The authors Auluck & West (2017) researched a study that examines transcript records and demographic information of nearly 70,000 students across over 15 years of registrar records at public universities. This research study performed a descriptive analysis of persistence, performance, and academic migration patterns of community college transfers, transfers from four-year institutions, and first-year student entrants. The study found little difference between community college transfers and first-year student entrants in terms of post-transfer grades and persistence. Transfers from four-year institutions had higher grades but also had higher attrition rates than their peers. The authors of this study (Auluck & West, 2017) also found that there is no firm evidence of transfer shock on students' post-transfer grades.

Auluck and West's (2017) study presented a view of transfer student performance from community colleges and 4-year institutions. Their results contributed to the ongoing debate surrounding the role of community colleges. The authors (Auluck & West, 2017) found that students transferring from 2-year colleges perform as well as non-transfer students post-transfer across a dataset of eight years. This study included all matriculated, degree seeking under-

graduate students who were either freshmen or transfers from two and four U.S. four-year colleges and enrolled at the University of Washington between 1998-2006 (Auluck & West, 2017).

Additionally, their study showed higher grades and also higher attrition rates than their peers. Lastly, the authors study presents information on student migration patterns, finding that first-year students tend to shift between majors at a higher rate than transfer students (Auluck & West, 2017).

Student Retention: Tinto's Model

In the field of academic student retention literature, Tinto's model is commonly used. It is a widely used model (Kember, 1995) providing a heuristic and theoretical framework for understanding behavior (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1982; Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto's theory, the decision to 'drop-out' arises from a combination of student characteristics and the extent of their academic, environmental, and social integration in an academic institution (Connolly, 2016). Tinto's original model, (Tinto, 1975) illustrated on next page contained five categories with constructs interacting to determine a student's dropout decision.

In many respects, the three primary principles of Tinto's model are: (a) describe processes whereby institutions of higher education were committed to the students they serve; (b) they were committed to the education of all, not just some, or their students (Connolly, 2016); and (c) they are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students integrate as competent members (Connolly, 2016).

Further work by Tinto led to the development of a longitudinal, explanatory model of departure (Tinto, 1993) illustrated in Figure 2 on page 22. This expanded work added adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or

commitments to his original model, illustrated in Figure 1 below on this page.

Tinto proposed that the stronger the individual's level of social and academic integration, the higher his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and the goal of college graduation (Tinto 1993).

Figure 1

Tinto's Original model Dropout from College 1975, (Connolly, 2016).

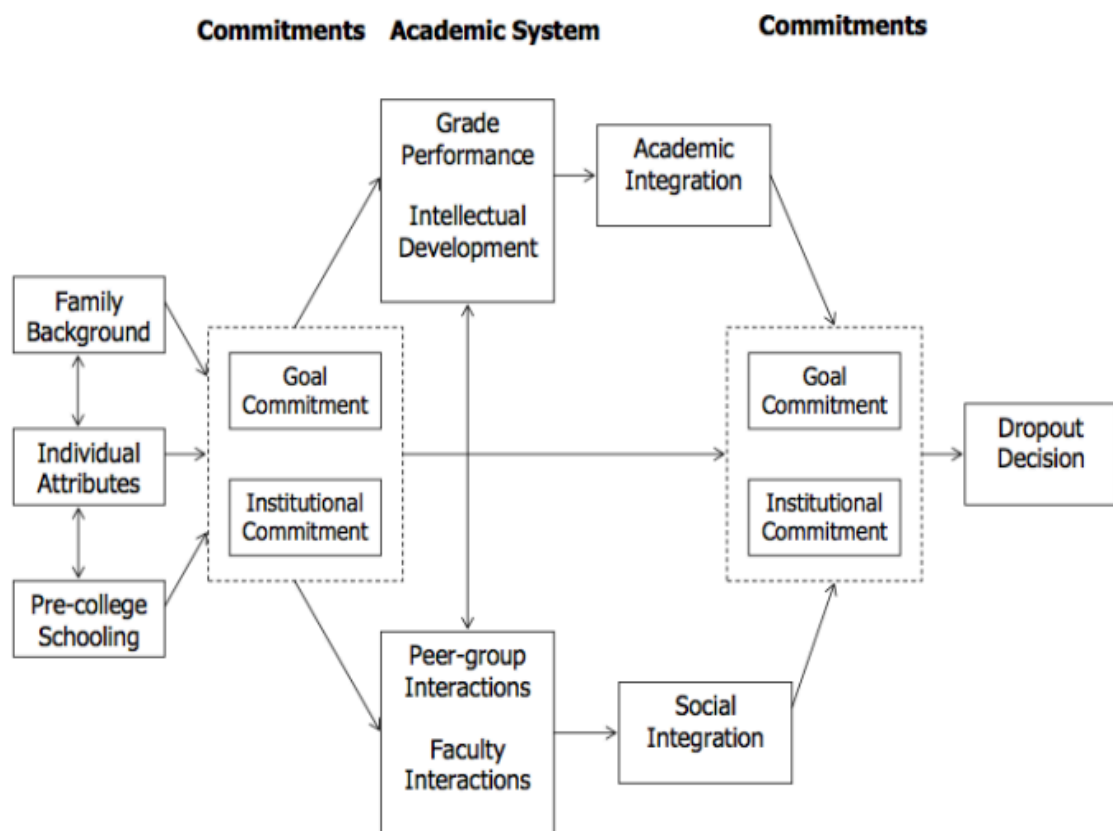
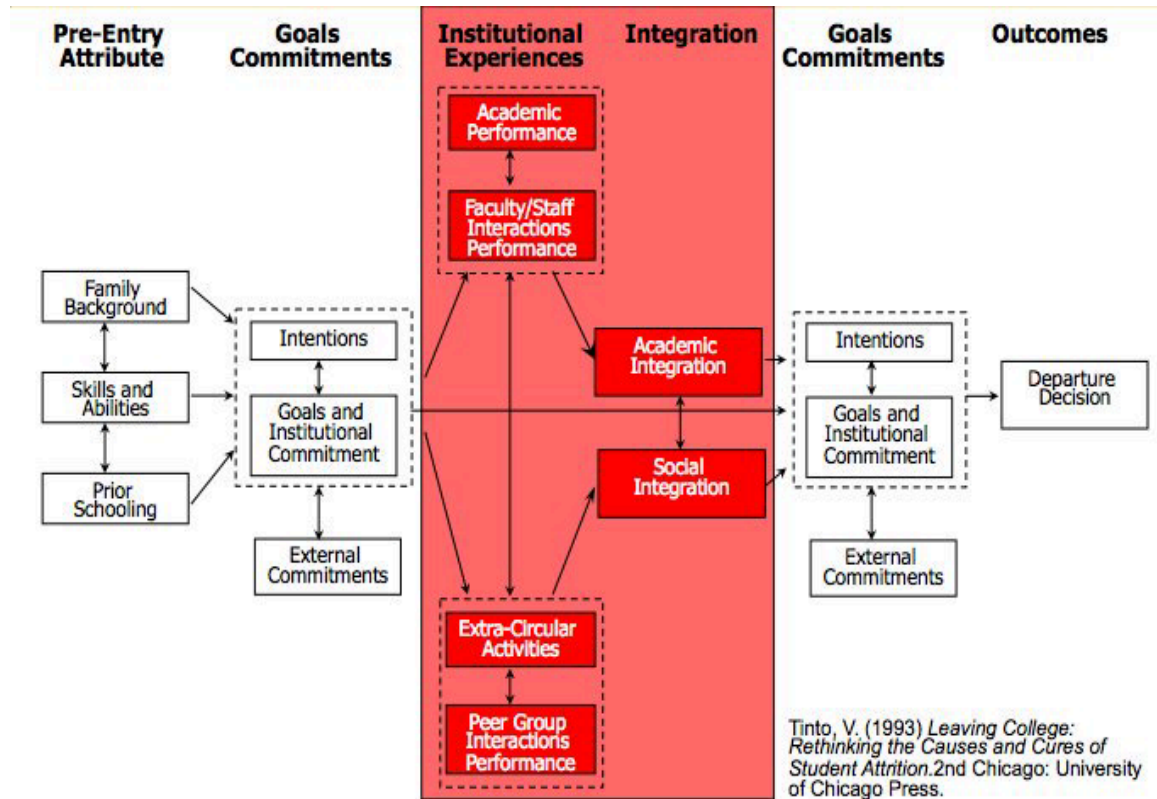


Figure 2

Tinto's Schema for Drop out from College 1993, (Connolly, 2016 p. 2).



Connolly (2016) has stated that Tinto's model remains one of the most influential models of dropout for higher education. This model is fixed, illustrating the main variables, and in many respects, is non-dynamic and one-dimensional, an overarching weakness. The goal for academics and academic institutions is to focus on the two achievable factors mentioned above, Institutional Experience and Integration, which includes academic performance, staff interactions, extra-curricular activities and peer-group interactions (Connolly, 2016). These articles will guide our review of Mid-South University retention and graduation rates regarding transfer students. We hope to be able to clarify what institutional factors if any, affect transfer student success on MSU campuses.

Perception and Transfer Students

Tony Lazarowiz (2015) incorporated Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1995) to help fill the gap of understanding how community college students identified and evaluate themselves in their transition to a four-year institution. Schlossberg (1995) defined transition as any event or non-event that results in a change of relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Schlossberg identified four significant sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies, which are also known as the 4 S's. In Lazarowiz's (2015) qualitative study, interviews of twelve full-time community college transfer students at three points during their first semester at a four-year university were collected. After coding these interviews and journals, five themes emerged: funding the college experience, the transition takes time, support is critical, maturity, and personal responsibility. The twelve interviewed transfer students revealed feeling overcome at the beginning of the transitioning process.

A key factor for feeling overcome was the overload of information such as campus tours, enormous campuses, locations, and activities. Some students were overwhelmed with the costs of tuition and the student population. One participant stated that he felt the transitioning would never end because he was always finding out "something." He felt it would always be this way at the university and continued to keep this thought in the back of his mind. Discovered through interviews were transfer students that felt insecure upon arriving which was caused by learning a new environment, understanding the resources, and support systems on campus. Confidence was developed in abilities by knowing where to find the important places pertinent to them. These students were found to typically feel ignored by college personnel.

Also, transfer students believed they were treated with minimal effort in assistance and guidance in the transition process.

Lazarowicz (2015) stated that transfer students each presented their own set of challenges, experiences, and concerns. True of all of these sub-groups is that they have attended multiple institutions or became classified as transfer students. Community college transfer students tend to be older, first-generation, low-income, and racially diverse. Nearly sixty percent of students who graduated from college attended multiple institutions, according to a report conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2018. The author suggested that many transfer students transitioning to a four-year college or university experienced campus culture shock. Culture shock is anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Community college transfer students exhibit needing a sense of direction and wanting guidance, but not in a patronizing way.

According to Lazarowicz (2015), students viewed themselves as mature going through a transition. The average age of students interviewed was twenty-five. Because these students had a broader range of life experiences having attended multiple institutions, they all felt very focused. Many of the students believed they blended in with the broader range of students that attended the college. Most of the students around them were non-traditional. Responsibility for their degree was personally significant to them. They all were open to communicating with many of the students around them and getting help. The participants valued involvement. Highlighted in the interviews was the quality of academic advising. Many complained that it would be easier to find resources most relevant to community college transfer students if the information was simplified.

Lazarowicz (2015) states that consistent with those who have used Schlossberg's

Transition theory is the value of the theoretical framework when working with transfer students. He goes on to conclude on the importance of creating policies that are mindful of a growing transfer student population and their coping resources.

Authors Means and Pyne (2017) covered the topic of student perceptions, institutional support, and belonging. In this qualitative study, the authors followed ten low-income, first-generation students in their first year of college. Examined are the institutional support systems that are reported to help students academically and socially. The article included a review of scholarship programs, academic support programs, student organizations, residence hall communities, and faculty relationships. Relationships with faculty, administrative staff, and administration members were reported as not supportive. Those students who underperformed in the classroom showed a significant decline in the sense of belonging over the course of the academic year. The authors believe this decline is because higher education is a place that is historical of privilege, power, and the economically wealthy (Means & Pyne, 2017).

The authors believe that first-generation, low-income college students, whose identity is already compromised in a historically hostile environment, need support in successfully navigating institutional structures. Authors Means and Pyne (2017) suggest that institutions investigate their institutional structures along with administrative support staff for prejudices. Furthermore, Student Affairs members trained in conflict management should work with student leaders to support these goals and identify those climate matters that interfere with minority student progress (Means & Pyne, 2017). In 2006, Tinto determined that there was a continued challenge in promoting the success of non-White, low-income, and female students. Reviews of college programs and extracurricular activities institutions promoted to improve the quality of the freshman year experience were completed.

These early efforts to retain students, however, found that institutions did not address the experience of students from two-year institutions, other ethnicities, income, orientation, or gender. Many of the studies of student retention were quantitative research done by residential universities and students of majority backgrounds (Tinto, 2006). Retention activities were placed in the responsibilities of student affairs professionals as an appendage and did not integrate with the campus (Tinto, 2006).

Changes in the study and practice of student retention have since reshaped the college campuses. First, the understanding of student retention has improved, and appreciation for students of all different backgrounds has developed from multifaceted forces like cultural, economic, and socially informed (Tinto, 2006). Second, student retention processes differently in certain institutional settings, residential and non-residential, as well as in two-year and four-year colleges. Third, increased knowledge about the complexity of student retention has now been added to the range of models, some sociological, some psychological, and other economic in nature that reveal why transfer students are dropping out (Tinto, 2006). What has been found to be crucial in the first year of the transfer students' experience is engagement on campus during their first year of college (Tinto, 2006).

However, involvement for some transfer students does not work in certain environments (e.g., non-residential institutions), nontypical students (e.g., a commuting student who works), and does not contribute in ways that add to transfer retention and baccalaureate attainment (Tinto, 2006).

The act of an institution gaining insight into a student's experiences and family history, to expand on academic and social integration, is not as useful because it does not have an immediate impact (Tinto, 2006). While this information may help design a tailored support

program for the student, the institution does not have a clear guarantee that working with student's prior experiences and private life will produce a desirable outcome for the student to persist. The concept of academic and social integration is useful to theorists in an abstract way, but institutions and practitioners need to know how to help students persist and succeed. Current theories of students dropping out typically utilize abstractions and variables but remain difficult to prove and change into a means of practice institutionally (Tinto, 2006).

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MANUSCRIPT TWO (COATS)

INTRODUCTION

Transfer students represent a diverse student population in terms of characteristics that include race, age, and socio-economic status. How institutions support or fail to help transfer students adequately is reflective of an overall institutional commitment to serving all students. From support for transfer, undocumented, underrepresented, and marginalized students to related aspects of access, student health, and increasing costs, we must remain vigilant in our pursuit of social justice in higher education (Nair & Thomas, 2018). In order to be successful in furthering social justice and equity in higher education, leaders need an understanding of how to serve and build communities for students across differences and the intersectionality of various identities that have been marginalized in higher education and society (Nair & Thomas, 2018).

Transfer students should be an integral part of the student population and be included in social justice efforts in higher education, which seek to further access, persistence, success, and graduation for all students. An institution's transfer retention rate is the percentage of new transfer students who enroll in the same university the following semester or year (Burrell, 2019). When a transfer student transfers to another school or drops out after the first semester, this can impact the four-year institution (Burrell, 2019).

The retention and graduation rates are statistics that incoming transfer students may use to evaluate an academic institution (Burrell, 2019). What follows are a couple of factors that influence retention rates. First-generation students tend to have a lower retention rate because they are experiencing life events outside of their familiarity. Therefore, they are not likely to

have the support from home that other students may have (Burrell, 2019). They may be of low-socio-economic status, have jobs and children, or a single parent while striving to do well academically.

Race contributes to the retention rate. Blacks, Hispanics are likely to enroll in lower-tier schools (Burrell, 2019). Although enrollment rates for minorities are on the rise, retention, and graduation rates are not keeping up with enrollment rates (Burrell, 2019). Whites and Asians tend to disproportionately represent top-tier universities where there are a higher rates of retention and graduation rates (Burrell, 2019).

This companion dissertation research began on a university that has central and regional campuses located in the Mid-South Region of the United States. The Mid-South University declares in its mission statement a commitment to ensuring access to high-quality education for underrepresented and historically underserved transfer students.

This companion dissertation in practice examines issues that can potentially affect the full-time new transfer student outcomes as they transfer to a university. For this study, full-time new transfer students are considered to be undergraduates enrolled at the receiving university for the first time in a minimum of 12 credit hours. These students are not enrolled in college for the first time. The focus of this manuscript is to consider full-time new transfer student outcomes while attending Mid-South University campuses, specifically:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the chosen outcomes for transfer students attending Mid-South Public

University (MSU) campuses? Specifically, the study examines the following results:

- a. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University central campus?

- b. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time transfer students who enter the Mid-South University regional campuses?
 - c. What are the 2 and 4-year collective graduation rates for full-time transfer students who either attend the Mid-South central or a regional campus?
 - d. What are the first-semester retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - e. What are the second-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - f. What are the third-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
2. What are the 4 and 6-year graduation rates of full-time freshmen and the 6-year graduation rates of new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University Central campus? How do the 6-year cohort graduation rates of transfer students between the Central and regional campuses compare?

SUMMARY OF PROBLEM: CHALLENGES TO TRANSFER

Despite the popularity of community colleges and the willingness of students to use these institutions as an essential part of their strategy to earn a bachelor's degree, the transfer process itself is often exceedingly complex (Marling, 2013). Transfer students must cope with the translation of their community college courses into bachelor's degree credits at four-year institutions. Some courses transfer, and some will not, contingent upon the academic policies of the four-year institution.

Articulation agreements – formal arrangements that specify the type and number of

courses a four-year institution will accept from a given community college usually differ (Marling, 2013). The need for a vigorous and efficient transfer process will become ever more critical. It will serve the nation well to focus on transfer credit as universities admit transfer students while attempting to retain and increase the number of transfers seeking a bachelor's degree (Marling, 2013).

Recent surveys indicate that at least 50%, and perhaps as many as 80%, of all incoming, first-time, community college students seek to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree (Marling, 2013). According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, the proportion of students surveyed who intended to earn a four-year degree rose from 70.7 percent to 81.4 percent between 1989-90 and 2003-04 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011).

Students from underserved groups, including African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students, as well as students from low-income groups, value this educational goal (Marling, 2013); many of these students will seek to transfer from two-year to four-year institutions.

The transfer process is seen as a pathway to a four-year degree by millions of students in which they can obtain a bachelor's degree. Four-year colleges and universities have historically preferred to enroll students directly from high school rather than from community colleges, believing that the supply of first-time students was inexhaustible. The amount is not drying up, but it is indeed slowing down (Marling, 2013, p. 10).

The U.S. Department of Education predicts that the high school graduation rate will be in decline between 2012 and 2020 (Hussar & Bailey). The department anticipates that high school graduation rates will level off or decline in some states (Hussar & Bailey, 2016, p. 15).

Therefore, new transfer students transferring to a four-year university will fill seats that would otherwise be occupied by 18-year-olds (Marling, 2013). Retaining these new transfer students at the 4-year institution is crucial in sustaining graduation rates at the baccalaureate degree level.

University Regional Campus Accessibility

As a researcher at Mid-South University, I have learned that typically traditional age transfer students attend the central campus. In contrast, the local community college transfer students generally enroll in a regional university campus. Recent surveys indicate that at least 50%, and perhaps as many as 80%, of all incoming, first-time, community college students seek to transfer and earn a bachelor's degree (Marling, 2013). According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, the proportion of students surveyed who intended to earn a four-year degree rose from 70.7 percent to 81.4 percent between 1989-90 and 2003-04 (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011). The students from underserved groups, including African American, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander students, as well as students from low-income groups, value this educational goal (Marling, 2013); many of these students will seek to transfer from two-year to four-year institutions.

One of the institution's main objectives is to retain the students through the completion of a bachelor's degree from the MSU campus. Many of the institutional factors that affect outcomes like retention and graduation rates of transfer students at Mid-South University are the lack of support services like tutoring, writing center, and class scheduling which are needed for the unprepared student. The class schedule is a contributing factor, as well as the knowledge of resources made accessible at the four-year institution. We believe that once the four-year institution admits the transfer students, the institution is responsible for making sure resources

are available for student success.

DATA ASSESSMENT

Strategies for improving student retention

To address the problem of low student retention rates, institutions of higher learning can teach students habits for success (McAughtrie, 2016). Most transfer students abandon colleges or universities because of their misunderstanding of what the university expects of them. Transfer students are unfamiliar with the resources the receiving university offers. The university can make resources assessable to transfer students through convocation, orientation, and transfer seminars (McAughtrie, 2016). Additionally, universities need to ensure that transfer students understand the GPA requirement that will keep them in good standing, plus activities and opportunities they can participate in to become more involved with the university community in and out of the classroom (McAughtrie, 2016). Additionally, universities can also create definable goals for transfer student retention. Universities that do not set goals have a harder time measuring success and putting effective programs in place for transfer students (McAughtrie, 2016).

The academic institutions can also develop intervention programs for a transfer student. One of the most efficient ways to improve student retention is to reach at-risk students before they transfer out of the community college or a university to the receiving university (McAughtrie, 2016). Transfer students who are experiencing academic, personal, financial, or social problems should be made aware of the university resources and workshops that can assist them at their receiving institution (McAughtrie, 2016). Academic advising is a critical factor in transfer student success (McAughtrie, 2016). Helpful, knowledgeable, accessible advisors are

essential for helping transfer students access campus programs and resources and improving retention rates (McAughtrie, 2016).

Why Transfer Students Do Not Graduate

There are many reasons transfer students do not graduate once they transfer to a four-year university. The transferal of academic course credit from the community college may not apply toward the bachelor's degree they are pursuing due to a variety of reasons. This issue could cause the student to incur more costs to enroll in another course, to replace the course credit that did not apply to his specific degree. Enrolling in another transferable course adds more time to the completion of the degree. A financial strain of attending a four-year university can place a burden on students and their families. Some students veer off course by enrolling in courses that do not apply to their intended major. Many undergraduates do not declare a major because they are unsure of their academic interests. Hence, they register and explore courses that do not count toward their degree progression.

The academic advisor can make a mistake and misadvise a student, which impacts degree completion. The student can omit their pre-requisite course(s) and have to remain in school a while longer. Students who choose not to engage in social activities outside of class can develop depression and social isolation, and therefore, they decide to drop out. On the flip side of the social life, a student may get too involved and struggle academically in their coursework.

Numerous transfer students work a full-time job and have children, a spouse, and they become overwhelmed with life and dropout. Time management skills are essential for personal and school life to work conjointly. Other transfer students may leave school because they become caregivers for a member of their family. Military transfer students may leave the educational institution because they receive an order to report for active duty.

Some students look for the convenience of online and distance learning programs; therefore, they drop out to seek those opportunities if their institution does not have these accessible.

In summary, some research states that transfer place-bound students are typically unprepared for the rigor on a four-year university. Therefore their graduation rates generally are a lot lower than non-transfer students. This study will report graduation rates and retention of Mid-South University while analyzing the transfer student percentages on MSU campuses.

Data Overview

This manuscript looks at transfer student success by reviewing the retention and graduation rates of transfer student data of the Mid-South University campuses. The primary emphasis is to determine the retention and graduation rates of MSU transfer students according to the statistics collected in this study. We will later review in Manuscript Three selected programs that can be utilized to retain transfer students through graduation. As researchers for this analysis, we recognized that using the institution's existing data would improve the assessment for this problem of practice.

We received the data from the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness, and Planning at the Mid-South University, which we are investigating. First, we will examine the outcomes of retention and graduation rates of Mid-South University campuses. Secondly, we will evaluate the four-year graduation rates comparing it to the transfer students entering the central campus as a freshman. To retrieve data from the University for this comparative analysis research, we submitted an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to approve the study. Once we received IRB approval, we made an appointment and met with an IR (Institutional Research) representative. She assisted with creating the type of requests that would provide the statistics needed to answer the research questions.

The research representative disclosed that the Mid-South University does not keep distinctive regional campus statistical data. Therefore, we were unable to retrieve data from the institution the student transferred (IR staff, personal communication, Jan 22, 2019). Consequently, we were not able to acquire the transfer population demographics from individual regional campuses.

The institution also does not gather the campus information from where the student transferred or originated. Therefore, we could not verify where the first-time transfer students began their transfer process. After meeting with the IR representative, we were able to determine what type of transfer data was available at the Mid-South University, which would answer our research questions. Lastly, the Office of Institutional Research, Effectiveness and Planning, provided the data for this study via email. The following inquiries are the queries that were submitted on the IREP form to gather first-year transfer data for this study.

First, we requested which type of campus the full-time transfer student attended. Secondly, we asked for the four-year graduation rate for full-time new transfer students on the central and regional campuses. Thirdly, we requested the first, second, and third-year retention percentage for full-time new transfer students who attended the Mid-South universities. Lastly, we asked for the comparable graduation rates for full-time transfer students and full-time first-year students who began their education on MSU's central campus.

FINDINGS

The primary emphasis of this evaluation is to assess the transfer student's transition process. The probing questions that will examine this study are the retention and graduation rates of the transfer students attending the four-year Mid-South Public University. The institutional outcomes will indicate if the university, faculty, and staff need to provide more

resources to support transfer student academic success across campuses. The university should work on offering the same kind of access to resources to demonstrate equity among all student populations. Our anticipation is those transfer students receive the same resources and opportunities as other students to increase the retention rate, which will allow an increase in the degree achievement. What are the chosen outcomes for transfer students attending Mid-South Public University campuses? Specifically, the study examines the results of the following questions:

1. What are the chosen outcomes for transfer students attending Mid-South Public University campuses? Specifically, the study examines the following results:
 - a. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University central campus?
 - b. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time junior transfer students who enter the Mid-South University regional campuses?
 - c. What are the 2 and 4-year collective graduation rates for full-time transfer students who either attend the Mid-South central and regional campus?
 - d. What are the first-semester retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - e. What are the second-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - f. What are the third-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
2. What are the 4 and 6-year graduation rates of full-time freshmen and the 6-year graduation rates of new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University Central campus?

Compare the 6 year cohort graduation rates of transfer students between the Central and regional campuses.

This manuscript will display the data obtained from the university's institutional research department to answer the research questions stated previously. The definition of terms listed below provide you a clarification of how our data was collected from the institutional research office located on the Mid-South Central Campus

Definition of Terms

Below is a list of terminologies we will utilize throughout this study:

2-Year Graduation Rates: The percentage total number of completers within the 2 years of entry into the institution divided by the cohort total (NCES, 2019).

4-Year Graduation Rates: The percentage total number of completers within the 4 years of entry into the institution divided by the cohort total (NCES, 2019). .

6-Year Graduation Rates: The percentage total number of completers within the 6years of entry into the institution divided by the cohort total (NCES, 2019)..

Cohort: This is a specific group of students established for higher education tracking purposes (NCES, 2019).

Cohort Year: The year that a cohort of students begins attending college (NCES, 2019).

Full-time Cohort: "A student who has no prior postsecondary experience attending any academic institutions for the first time as a full-time undergraduate is considered in this group. They generally enrolled in 12 or more hours during the fall or previous summer term following entry. This cohort also includes students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school)" (IR staff, personal communication, Aug 2, 2019).

Full-time Transfer Cohort: Undergraduate student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, or

12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more clock hours a week each term. This is a specific group transferred from another institution and may or may not have an associate degree. These students are tracked upon entry into a 4-year institution for higher education tracking purposes (NCES, 2019).

Graduation Rate: This rate is calculated as the total number of completers within 150% of normal time divided by the revised adjusted cohort (NCES, 2019).

Mid-South Central Campus: The Central campus is a large research university with more than 20,000 students with numerous undergraduates and graduate degree programs. Many of its students are traditional-age students who live on or near campus and are full-time students. It is a predominately white institution with a high percentage of females. It has a substantial non-resident population. The central campus has an abundance of resources to keep the student involved on campus.

Mid-South Regional Campuses: Branch campuses of the MSU that are physically at a distance from the central campus with a limited amount of student resources. The branch campuses share physical space within the community college in another city. They are smaller than the central campus and serve as feeders and offer full programs of study and not just courses. Transfer students commenced their entry to an MSU regional campus as a junior with 60 hours seeking a bachelor's degree. The regional campus population consists of traditional and non-traditional, place-bound adult learners, first-generation, and low-socioeconomic students.

Retention Rate: A measure of the rate at which students persist in their educational program at an institution, expressed as a percentage. For four-year institutions, this is the percentage of first-time bachelors (or equivalent) degree seeking undergraduates from the previous fall who again enrolled in the current Fall (NCES, 2019).

Transfer Equivalency/Articulation Agreements: Articulation agreements are contracts put in place to transfer academic credit to a 4-year university. These community college freshmen and sophomore academic credits transfer towards completing a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year university. The institutions review the course descriptions to determine if the community college course is equivalent to the course at the receiving university. A community college transfer student can transfer up to 61 credit hours to an MSU campus.

Transfer Student: “These students are all full-time students who are attending MSU as undergraduates for the first time, transferring from another institution. The transfer students are collected via cohorts at the time of entry to MSU. Their entry is not centered on hours completed or classification (i.e., Freshmen, Sophomore, Juniors or Seniors)” (IR staff, personal communication, Aug 2, 2019).

Mid-South University Campus Categories

Full-time new transfer students headcount attending MSU Campuses

Table 1

Campus type/categories for full-time new transfer students who attended a Mid-South University Campus

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Campus Type	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Central	978	895	879	945	887	1048	1029	965	937
Regional	446	462	447	383	376	377	334	298	257
Grand Total	1424	1357	1326	1328	1263	1425	1363	1263	1194

Note. *This data is the headcount for transfer students who, entered a MSU campus as a full-time transfer*

Table 1 displays the headcount for the full-time new transfer students who were admitted to Mid-South University’s central and regional campuses collectively. Table 1 illustrates nine cohort years from 2010-2018.

The 2011 cohort is the largest full-time new transfer student group across the MSU regional campuses, while the 2015 cohort has the largest number of central full-time new

transfers. Mid South University regional campuses headcount progressively descended in the last six cohorts of 2013-2018 except cohort 2015, while the central campus continued to decrease in the previous two cohorts 2017-2018 as presented in table 1.

TRANSFER STUDENT GRADUATION RATES

2-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Central Campus

Table 2a

2-year graduation rate of full-time transfers who attended MSU central campus

	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort
Graduation Rate	21.5%	19.9%	25.9%	24.3%	25.6%	26.5%	31.4%
Graduates	210	178	228	230	227	278	323
Total # of Students in Cohort	978	895	879	945	887	1048	1029

Note. This data represents 2-year graduation rate for full-time transfers attending MSU Central Campus

Table 2a: 2-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Central Campus

Table 2a displays the 2-year graduation rates of full-time transfer students who entered the Mid-South Central campus from Fall 2010 to Fall 2016. The two-year graduation rate over this period ranged from 19.9% to 31.4% and has increased each year, beginning with the 2013 cohort with a 24.3% and ending with 31.4% for cohort 2016 on the central campus.

4-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Central Campus

Table 2b

4-year graduation rate of full-time transfers who attended MSU Central Campus

	2008 Cohort	2009 Cohort	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort
Graduation Rates	61.1%	60.5%	61.5%	55.9%	61.5%	57.8%	60.9%
Graduates	429	467	602	500	541	546	542
Total # of Students in Cohort	702	772	978	895	879	945	888

Note. This data represents 4-year graduation rate for full-time transfers attending MSU Central Campus

Table 2b: 4-year transfer graduation rate on MSU Central Campus

Table 2b shows the 4-year graduation rate of full-time transfer students who enrolled at the Mid-South Central Campus during Fall 2008–Fall 2014. MSU captured seven years of data for the populations who did graduate within 4-years. Notably, the graduation rate for the cohort 2011 is 55.9%, which is lower than the other six cohorts in the group. Cohorts 2010 and 2012 had the highest 4-year graduation rates on the central campus, with 61.5%.

2-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Regional Campuses

Table 3a

2-year graduation rates of full-time transfers who attended MSU regional campuses

	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort
Graduation Rate	38.4%	37.7%	40.0%	44.1%	44.4%	45.1%	50.0%
Graduates	171	174	179	169	167	170	167
Total # of Students in Cohort	446	462	447	383	376	377	334

Note. This data represents the 2-Year graduation rates of full-time MSU Transfers attending the regional campuses

Table 3a displays the 2-year transfer graduation rates on the Mid-South regional campuses across seven cohorts. The cohorts for this table were captured for students entering Fall 2010 – Fall 2016. Cohort 2011 exhibits the lowest 2-year graduation rate on MSU regional campuses with 37.7%. The 2-year graduation rate on the regional campuses is highest for cohort 2016 at 50%.

4-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Regional Campuses

Table 3b

<i>4-year graduation rates of full-time transfers who attended MSU regional campuses</i>							
	2008 Cohort	2009 Cohort	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort
Graduation Rate	64.6%	65.1%	64.7%	59.1%	61.7%	65.5%	70.5%
Graduates	201	261	288	273	276	251	265
Total # of Students in Cohort	311	401	445	462	447	383	376
<i>Note. This data represents the 4-Year graduation rates of full-time MSU transfers attending the regional campuses</i>							

Table 3b displays the 4-year transfer graduation rates on MSU regional campuses. The 2011 cohort has the lowest graduation rate among those listed in Table 3b, but graduation rates began to increase each year beginning with the 2012 cohort. The highest graduation rates exhibited are cohorts 2013 and 2014, with a graduation rate of 65.5% and 70.5% respectively.

2 and 4-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Central and Regional Campuses

Collectively

Table 4a

<i>2-year graduation rate of full-time transfers who attended MSU central and regional campuses</i>							
	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort
Graduation Rate	32.3%	30.9%	36.0%	31.0%	37.3%	38.0%	39.4%
Graduates	501	449	521	401	505	553	549
Total # of Students in Cohort	1550	1455	1448	1293	1353	1456	1395
<i>Note. This data represents 2-year graduation rate for full-time transfers attending MSU campuses</i>							

Table 4a represents the 2-year graduation rates for all Mid-South University campuses collectively. The lowest 2-year graduation rate is cohort 2011, with 30.9%. The three cohorts within this group with the highest graduation rates were cohorts 2014-2016 with percentages between 37.3%-39.4%

4-year transfer graduation rates on MSU Central and Regional Campuses

Table 4b

4-year graduation rate of full-time transfers who attended MSU central and regional campuses

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Graduation Rate	66.3%	65.3%	65.3%	59.7%	64.1%	60.9%	66.7%
Graduates	831	848	1012	869	928	788	902
Total # of Students in Cohort	1254	1298	1551	1457	1448	1293	1354

Note. This data represents 4-year graduation rate for full-time transfers attending MSU campuses

Table 4b illustrates the 4-year graduation rates of seven cohorts of transfer students who made their entry on one of the MSU campuses between Fall 2008 and Fall 2014. Most of the cohorts in this group shown in Table 4b are relatively close with their 4-year transfer combined campus graduation percentages ranging from 60.0% to the highest of 66.7%. It is also easy to view cohort 2011 in this group and see that it has the lowest 4-year graduation rate of 59.7%.

RETENTION RATES

Full-time transfer students who were retained from 1st entry Fall to the Spring Semester on MSU Campuses

Table 5

First-semester retention rates for full-time new transfer students (Retain to Spring)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Retention Rate	87.6%	88.9%	87.0%	86.7%	88.7%	85.4%	87.8%	87.8%	90.7%
#Retained	1032	1276	1188	1162	1111	1069	1186	1139	1033
Total # of Students in Cohort	1298	1551	1457	1448	1293	1354	1457	1397	1228

Note. First-year full-time transfer retention rates. (Retained to Spring semester)

Table 5 displays spring semester retention rates for transfer students enrolled in MSU campuses. The chart depicts nine transfer student cohorts, 2009-2017, and the percentage of

transfer students retained to the following springsemester. The first-semester retention rates for full-time transfer students on the MSU campuses ranged from 85.4%-90.7%. All of the groups persisted at a steady percentage between 87.0%-90.7% except for cohort 2014, which experienced the lowest retention of 85.4%. The 2017 spring cohort had the highest retention rate, which was 90.7%.

Full Time transfer students' second year retention rates on the Mid-South University Campuses

Table 6

Second-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students (Retained to Year 2)

	2009 Cohort	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort	2017 Cohort
Retention Rate	74.2%	74.5%	71.5%	73.4%	74.2%	74.0%	77.4%	76.2%	79.3%
# Retained	874	1069	975	983	929	926	1045	944	903
Total Cohort Size	1178	1434	1363	1340	1252	1252	1351	1252	1139

Note. Second-year full-time transfer retention rate cohort. (Retained to year 2)

Table 6 displays the second-year retention rates for full-time transfer students. The retention rates for these nine cohorts range between 71.5%-79.3% of full-time transfer students who remained at the university their second year. The highest MSU second-year retention rate is 79.3%, which occurred in the 2017 cohort. The 2011 cohort full-time transfer student cohort had the lowest retention rate of 71.5%.

The data for cohorts 2015 and 2017 in this group, shows that Mid-South University is persisting with a positive progression for retaining more transfers to their second-year of entering the four-year receiving university with percentages between 77.4% -79.3% while cohort 2016 data show a decline retention rate of 76.2%.

Full-time transfer students' third year retention and graduation rates on the Mid-South University Campuses

Table 7

Third-Year Retention Rates for full-time new transfer students (Retained to year 3)

	2008 Cohort	2009 Cohort	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort	2015 Cohort	2016 Cohort
Retention Rate	34.8%	35.4%	40.3%	36.7%	35.4%	37.8%	35.3%	35.4%	33.0%
# Retained	424	456	620	531	510	487	475	511	457
Graduation Rates	38.6%	37.1%	32.5%	31.0%	36.1%	31.2%	37.6%	38.2%	39.6%
Graduates	471	477	501	449	521	401	505	553	549
Total # of Students in Cohort	1220	1287	1540	1447	1442	1287	1345	1445	1385

Note. Third-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students (Retained to year 3)

Table 7 shows the third-year retention and graduation rates on Mid-South University campuses. The third-year retention rates for nine cohorts displayed in Table 7 range between 33.0%-40.3% and graduation rates for these cohorts range between 31.0% and 39.6%. These cohorts of transfer students demonstrates success toward completing their degree.

First-year 4 and 6 -year graduation rates on Central Campus

Table 8a

4-year graduation rate of full-time first-year students who attended MSU central campus

	2008 Cohort	2009 Cohort	2010 Cohort	2011 Cohort	2012 Cohort	2013 Cohort	2014 Cohort
Graduation Rate	37.0%	39.1%	37.0%	38.6%	43.8%	46.0%	48.3%
Graduates	856	996	1135	1365	1467	1637	1808
Total # of Students in Cohort	2312	2550	3067	3542	3351	3564	3764

Note. This data represents 4-year graduation rate for full-time freshman attending MSU central campus

The Mid-South junior central campus freshmen 4-year graduation rates for seven first-year cohorts are presented in Table 8a. The 2008 and 2010 cohorts had the lowest 4-year

graduation rate of 37.0 while the 2014 cohort has the highest rate of 48.3%. A persistent improvement of freshmen graduation rates is exhibited in cohorts 2011 -2014.

6-year graduation rates on the Central Campus

Table 8b

<i>6-Year graduation rate of full-time first-time students who attended MSU central campus</i>							
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Graduation Rate	60.0%	59.3%	61.4%	61.1%	59.8%	60.1%	64.2%
Graduates	1511	1444	1419	1557	1834	2123	2149
Total # of Students in Cohort	2517	2434	2311	2547	3065	3534	3347

Note. This data represents 6-year graduation rate for full-time freshman attending MSU central campus this also includes 4-year graduation

Six-year graduation rates for full-time first-year students that attend Mid-South Central Campus are depicted in Table 8b. These rates ranged from a low of 59.3% to a high of 64.2%. The graduation rates are consistent across the cohorts presented here.

6-Year transfer graduation rates on the Central Campus

Table 9

<i>6-year graduation rate of full-time transfer who attended the MSU central campuses</i>						
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Graduation Rate	67.8%	66.5%	65.3%	66.7%	61.7%	66.4%
Graduates	499	467	504	652	552	584
Total # of Students in Cohort	736	702	772	977	895	879

Note. This data represents 6-year graduation rate for full-time transfer attending MSU central campuses this also includes 4-year graduation

The Central campus 6-year transfer graduation rates ranged from 67.8% to 65.3% from 2007-2012.

6-year transfer graduation rates on the Regional Campuses

Table 10

6-year graduation rate of full-time transfer who attended the MSU regional campuses

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort	Cohort
Graduation Rate	66.2%	68.5%	70.6%	67.9%	62.1%	63.5%
Graduates	186	213	283	302	287	284
Total # of Students in Cohort	281	311	401	445	462	447

Note. This data represents 6-year graduation rate for full-time transfer attending MSU regional campuses this also includes 4-year graduation

Table 10 displays the transfer graduation rates of the 2007-2012 on MSU regional campuses. The cohorts have consistent graduation rates ranging from 62.1% to 70.6%.

SUMMARY OF DATA INTERPRETATION

Graduation Rates

The campus type data depict that Mid-South University has several campuses, which include one central and several regional campuses that transfer students who can begin their cohort entry to complete a 4-year Bachelor's degree.

As we view the 2-year graduation rates of full-time transfer students, who attend the MSU central campus, the data show low transfer graduation rates of 25.01%. Some may question why the graduation rates are low for these transfer students on the central campus. We can surmise that some of the reasons for the low graduation rates could be because the central campus can admit transfer students with 0 to numerous credit hours depending on whether the student transferred from a community college or another 4-year university. Also, these students that transfer to the central campus have a more extensive selection of programs to choose for a major. So sometimes, these students explore by enrolling in other coursework and changing their majors several times, which could also impact the graduation rates on central campus.

If a community college student transferred to the MSU central campus, they could transfer up to 60 credit hours upon entry to the university. A community college student transferring with 60 hours can face many difficulties, which can hinder their 2-year graduation. Unforeseeable events are inevitable. For instance, if a community college student transferred to the MSU central campus, they could transfer up to 60 credit hours upon entry to the university and be faced with difficulties. Some of his or her concerns could be one of the following, to name a few: financial, transportation issues, family illnesses, and some times becoming a caretaker for an ill parent or grandparent. A student could also have other concerns; for instance, college course schedules do not match availability work hours, a family, and children may need emotional support at home. These challenges can cause a student to become a part-time student, stop out, or drop out of the university. There could be several reasons unknown to us as the researcher as why there are low 2-year graduation rates on the Central campus.

The 4-year transfer graduation rates of 59.8% on the MSU central campus are slightly lower than the 4-year graduation rates on the regional campuses. This analysis could suggest to a researcher that some of the transfer students upon entry to the central campus transferred with 60+ hours. The course transferal again depends on whether they transferred from a community college or university, and if the courses are transferrable. In turn, the transfer student would only need 60 hours or two years to complete their bachelor's degree.

The 2-year graduation rate on MSU regional campuses is 42.8%, which is relatively higher than they are on the central campus. Again the regional campus full-time transfer students have to transfer 60 credit hours toward their degree before they enter an MSU regional campus. Therefore the 2-year graduation rates should be reasonably higher than central campus 2-year full-time transfers. These transfer students are advised using a 2+2 program sheet and

advisors at the community college, and the regional campus advises these students utilizing the 2+2 program sheets, therefore; these students are not enrolling in coursework they do not need.

The 4-year full-time transfer graduation rates 64.4% on the regional campuses are slightly higher than the 4-year full-time central campus rates. Again the regional campus transfer students have to transfer 60 credit hours toward their degree before they enter a regional campus. Therefore the 4-year graduation rates should be slightly higher than central campus full-time 4-year transfers. Also, the regional campus has advisors who only advise transfer students who are in the 2+2 programs on the regional campuses. If a transfer student opts to major in a program outside of the 2+2 program on the regional campuses, they would then enter as a transfer on the central campus.

The 2-year graduation rate for the combined campuses regional and central is 34.9%. This percentage is slightly higher than the central 2-year graduation rate because of the central campus full-time transfer students enter as transfer students with 0 to numerous credit hours depending on whether the student transferred from a community college or another 4-year university. This percentage is lower than the regional 2-year transfer graduation rates because the regional campus full-time transfer students have to transfer 60 credit hours toward their degree before they enter an MSU regional campus.

The freshmen 4-year full-time graduation rates on the MSU central campus average 41.4% for cohorts 2008-2014. This average is perhaps low because incoming many upon entry have to enroll in remedial coursework due to low subject scores on the ACT or SAT exam. Also, Freshmen students are known to change their majors several times throughout their undergraduate years.

The freshmen 6-year full-time graduation rates on the MSU central campus average 60.8% for seven cohorts 2006-2012. These rates are probably low because some of the freshmen dropped out, stopped out, or attending MSU central campus as a part-time student.

The 6-year full-time transfer student graduation rates on the MSU central campus display an average of 65.7% for six cohorts 2007-2012 whereas the average 4-yr graduation rate is 59.8%. We are unable to compare the six-year freshmen and transfer groups on the central campus because the cohort years are not alike.

If a student from a community college transferred to the central campus after attending community college longer than anticipated, this could cause the extended years on the central campus. Sometimes the transfer students have to enroll in remedial courses, and they change their majors from a technical pathway to an academic major, which would require more finances to enroll in extra coursework, which also extends the time to complete the bachelor's degree. Some of the transfer students make a decision to stop out or quit because they can no longer afford to attend. It is very critical that the advisors at the community college and the universities advise the students appropriately for student success. It would also be helpful if there were a small transfer office to cater to transfer students similar to the freshmen success office.

The 6-year graduation rate on the MSU regional campuses is 66.46. The rigorous coursework and working a full-time job can cause the students to be on probation, suspension academically, and suspended from receiving financial aid, which causes a student to quit because they cannot afford to continue. If there were tutoring resources on the regional campuses, the students might have an advantage in seeking academic assistance before failing a course. Also, if there were extended hours of 5:00-6:00 PM in the evening so that students could speak to their professors online via zoom for academic support. Also, if there were extended hours for student

services offices to assist students between these stated mentioned above hours, extended office hours could assist in the retention of transfer students and, therefore, increase the graduation rates.

Retention Rates

The transfer students attending Mid-South University campuses have higher first semester retention rates, with an average of 87.8% for the 2009-2017 cohorts.

The second-year retention rates for cohorts 2009-2017 display an average of 74.9% of full-time transfer students attending Mid-South University campuses.

The third-year retention rates for cohorts 2008-2016 display an average of 36.0% of full-time transfer students attending Mid-South University campuses.

Overall Summary

The overall summary of data confirms that the 4-year graduation rates examined in this Dissertation in Practice indicate that transfer students are graduating on average at a higher percentage of 64.4% on MSU regional campuses. Regional campuses are also showing the highest 4-year graduation rate of 70.5% during cohort 2014. There are fewer transfer student resources on the regional campuses and MSU central campus that has all the resources only graduates on average of 60.0 % of its transfer students. MSU central and regional campuses 4-year graduation rates are elevated to 64.0% when they are averaged collectively.

A higher education practitioner who mentors transfer students can now understand the progression of the transfer population on the MSU campuses through this study. One can understand that a transfer student manages to be retained and graduate at a better rate on a regional campus. We speculate that the regional campus transfer students' outcomes are better because, upon their first year of entry into the four-year university, they began their first

semester with 50-60 hours of coursework.

The transfer students on a UM regional campus are mostly related to a 2+2 articulation agreement if they transfer from a mid-south community college. Studies have shown that institutions have a greater attentiveness in first-year students than transfer students. This study shows the freshman 6-year graduation rate is 61% on average, which is lower than the first-year transfer graduation rate.

MSU should evaluate both populations in a more extensive study in order to be more informed about the retention and graduations of these types of students who attend all campuses. When this institution resolves to include regional transfer students in their graduation rates, they will begin to see an increase in their overall 4-year graduation rates.

The central campus transfer students do not include the number of completed transfer hours. The regional campuses, however, include its 50-60 schedule hours because they cannot be a transfer student on the regional campuses without fulfilling the 60 completed transfer hours. Regional campus transfer students usually complete their associate degree within the same major as their transfer program. This is likely an indication of why their graduation rates revealed slightly higher than those who transfer to the central campus.

LIMITATIONS of the DATA

A higher education practitioner can also see the adverse side of admitting transfer students on the central campus with zero to sixty transfer hours. Does this mean that the central campus is not equipped to handle transfer students?

Does this mean it does not have enough resources? Does this mean that the faculty and staff do not engage with this population? No, it does not indicate any of these things. The data could suggest the potential need for more staff for transfer students on the central campus,

similar to the dedicated transfer students staff and professors on the regional campuses to assist the students who experience transfer gaps when they transfer to a 4-year institution like MSU.

Also, the regional campuses may be more suitable for the needs of transfer students who may bring a different set of characteristics than the transfer students arriving on the central campus as a first-year student.

Transfer students enter the university sometimes with income barriers, educational unpreparedness, a deficiency of university knowledge, and limited counseling support. Therefore, we recommend a transfer office with staff that can work directly with transfer students to assist them in navigating the Mid-South University 4-year institution similar to the regional campuses. This study shows that a transfer office works on the regional campuses, therefore it may assist in transfer graduation and retention rates on MSU central campus.

FUTHER CONSIDERATIONS

So why are graduation rates and retention rates important to the Mid-South University community? First-time new transfers and first-year students, along with their parents, use this data when deciding what academic institution to attend. The graduation rate gives them insight into how many students are completing their degree on time once they enroll. This transparent metric holds institutions accountable, and new students can measure the quality of the university using this data. Again this data can be seen as flawed when representing transfer students because they are sometimes not included in the graduation rates compilations.

As with all public higher education institutions, retention and graduation rates are an area that each staff, faculty, and leadership has to continue to develop strategies. Developing these policies will help our transfer students complete successfully without barriers.

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MANUSCRIPT TWO (MOORE)

METHODS

Introduction

Institutions of higher education have practices, attitudes, and regulations that affect students and their success. Scholars (e.g., Dougherty, 1992; Labaree, 1997) suggest that such effects of institutional practices significantly impact transfer students more so than freshman. As researchers, we chose to conduct an examination of higher education institutions selected outcomes for transfer students and their administrative staff perspectives about transfer students. We chose a university located in the southern region of the United States. We believe it pertinent to the equity and accessibility of higher education to find influential factors that might be present for transfer students. After a review of previous research done by scholars on the subject of transfer students, we requested information from the state database to help review selected outcomes for transfer students with regard to retention and graduation. We also conducted interviews of administrators at the institution to better understand institutional perspectives and practices around transfer students. We framed our investigation through the lenses of enactment theory and critical race theory (CRT). We formulated three research questions to help us guide our study:

1. What are the chosen outcomes for transfer students attending Mid-South Public

University campuses? Specifically, the study examines the following results:

- a. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University central campus?

- b. What are the 2 and 4-year graduation rates for full-time transfer students who enter the Mid-South University regional campuses?
 - c. What are the 2 and 4-year collective graduation rates for full-time transfer students who either attend the Mid-South central and regional campus?
 - d. What are the first-semester retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - e. What are the second-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
 - f. What are the third-year retention rates for full-time new transfer students on MSU campuses?
2. What are the 4 and 6-year graduation rates of full-time freshmen and the 6-year graduation rates of new transfer students who enter the Mid-South University Central campus? Compare the 6-year cohort graduation rates of transfer students between the central and regional campuses.
 3. What are administrative staff perceptions of transfer students and Mid-South University's commitment to transfer students?

Administrative Staff Perceptions

We searched for the meaning, concepts, and characteristics of administrative staff perspectives about transfer students and how university policies and practices impacted transfer student success. We considered it essential to interview and discuss these issues with the administrative staff directly to supplement the information that was gained from reviewing formal state and institutional policies. Having conducted in-depth, semi-structural interviews helped us answer our research questions. However, we are mindful of how biases and

perceptions on the part of the interviewee and the researcher influence data outcomes. It should be noted that administrative staff might share perceptions and views that would differ from transfer students as participants.

For this study, we considered the voices of administrative staff a vital facet in better understanding institutional perspectives on transfer students. Still, we were aware that interviewees might have responded in ways focused on such issues as self-preservation or efforts to tell the researcher what they believe the researcher “wanted” to hear. The researchers also had to be aware that their preconceptions and interpretations are integral to data collection and analysis. In preparation for the interviews, we as researchers were trained and required to conduct several “practice interviews” through a qualitative research methods course. Our training involved a careful study of the interview protocol. Per the guidance of Glesne (2016), during the interview we allowed participants to talk using their words and at their preferred pace. We also avoided asking leading questions.

We did probe for further details in our interviews with the participants. We needed to be transparent in our purpose and agenda with our participants. Therefore, in endeavoring to enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of our qualitative interviews and analysis, we applied this set of criteria identified in the literature (e.g., Glesne, 2016) to address issues of transparency, validity, reliability, comparative and reflexive. Given this criterion, our objective to assess the administrative staff perceptions diligently and analytically was met.

The procedures we followed for this qualitative research were as follows:

1. First, we verified that each solicited participant held an administrative staff position at Mid-South University and or Mid-South Regional campus. Then we verified that each participant has a minimum of four years of interaction with transfer students. Participants with

full-time faculty responsibilities were excluded. There were no additional exclusions applied.

2. All interviews were conducted one-on-one, in person, in the location of participants' respective offices at Mid-South University or Mid-South Regional campus of the University. We wanted to make sure that the interview would take place in a quiet, comfortable place to ensure that the participant felt relaxed and inclined to speak. Our interview protocol consisted of nine questions. These nine questions were presented in a semi-structured format so that at any point in the interview, participants could be questioned with little disturbance to the natural flow of conversation.

3. Informal "chitchat" of approximately two minutes (Glesnes, 2016) took place before the interview to help establish rapport with participants.

4. The interviewer gave each participant a description of the study and asked each participant if he or she had interacted with transfer students in the last four years. If the participant's answer was no, the participant was not eligible for the study, and an interview could not take place. All participants met our criteria.

5. The purpose of the study, per guidance from Glesne (2016), was paraphrased. Following this statement, the participants were invited to ask and address any questions they may have had. Ethical issues concerning the participants' rights were then explained. Only after these steps were taken was the participant asked to read and sign the informed consent form. An additional copy of the consent form was provided for the participants' records.

6. We, as the interviewers, reminded the participant that the interview would be recorded for later transcription and provided details of how the recording would be saved. The participant was informed that throughout the life of the research project, the names or any other identifying information provided during the recorded interview would not be used in the

research results.

7. Seven (7) Subjects or participants were informed of the following:

a. You may be asked to provide necessary demographic information, which may include, but not be limited to, gender, age, length of the contract, and location of students with whom you may have helped.

b. Every precaution will be taken to prevent anyone from being able to identify subjects; the research study will use pseudonyms in place of the individuals' names.

c. Only the researchers and advisors will ever hear the recording for purposes of preparing a written transcript and ascertaining the accuracy of the transcript.

8. Field notes were taken during the process of interviewing. We were careful to resist our subjectivity by bracketing personal thoughts in our notes – acknowledging it and temporarily setting the thoughts aside – in order to understand and grasp even the most basic aspect of the study (Glesne, 2016).

9. When the participant felt comfortable, we then proceeded to ask prepared questions in intervals throughout the interview. With the exception of a few closed-ended questions, most of the nine prepared questions were open-ended in style.

10. Using the Patton Model (Glesne, 2016), the researchers asked participants questions related to their background, experience, opinion, feeling, knowledge and interaction with transfer students. The following nine prepared questions were asked during the interviews in this study:

a. What are your responsibilities, specifically, in your position here at the university?

(Background / Demographic)

b. Can you talk about the kind of interactions you regularly have with transfer students?

(Behavior / Experience)

- c. What kind of impact do you think these types of interactions have on transfer students' success? (*Opinion /Value*)
- d. What does "transfer students in their first year" mean to you? (*Feeling*)
- e. What would you say is the biggest challenge in working with transfer students here at the university? (*Behavior / Experience*)
- f. Is there a specific encounter that you can recall or experienced with a transfer student? (*Behavior / Experience*)
- g. What do you know about the regional campuses at this university? (*Knowledge*)
- h. How would you say overall transfer students help contribute to this university? What do they bring? (*Opinion /Value*)
- i. What would you say this university needs to do to help improve transfer student success? (*Opinion /Value*)

PARTICIPANTS SURVEY

We used a snowball sampling method (see Table 11). Participants with whom we already made contact used their social networks to refer us to other people who could potentially contribute to the study. Based on these referrals, we sent a total of twenty solicitation emails detailing the criteria of the study and eligibility. Some participants declined to participate, and others probed us with further queries. Participants were not offered anything for participation in the study. Seven administrative staff agreed to participate in our study: Five were from Mid-South University, and two were from Mid-South University Regional campus. The interviews lasted no longer than thirty minutes and were audio-recorded. The pseudonyms given to the seven participants are David (white male), Linda (white female), Heather (white female), Cathy (white female), Jake (white male), Charlie (Asian American male), and Vicky (white female).

Interviewee	Position	Source	Format	Length	Recording	Transcript
David	Support Service Director	Referral	Semi-Structure	45 min.	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Linda	Financial Aid Advisor	Referral	Semi-Structure	30 min.	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Heather	Academic Director	Referral	Semi-Structure	1 hr.	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Cathy	Assistant Academic Director	Referral	Semi-Structure	40 min.	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Charlie	Academic Program Director	Referral	Semi-Structure	20 min	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Vicky	Academic Advisor at Mid-South Regional	Referral	Semi-Structure	25 min	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required
Jake	Academic Advisor at Mid-South University Regional	Referral	Semi-Structure	30 min.	In-person w/concurrent note taking	Confidentiality required

Table 11: Interview methods table. Adapted from Glesne (2016) *'Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (Fifth ed.)'*

We implemented the following steps according to the researched guidelines suggested by Glesne (2016) and training received for conducting interviews:

1. Ask follow-up questions that pertain directly to the immediate conversation. This practice displays that you are listening carefully.
2. Shift direction of the conversation to guide without controlling the direction of the interview (Glesne, 2016).
3. Sustain the conversational flow (Glesne, 2016) without being insulting.
4. Paraphrase, often according to our research guide, into what we think is a good

substitute language. Paraphrasing shows a relational, genuine interest, and respect for another individual conversation (Glesne, 2016).

5. Be flexible and adaptive in our approach of inquiry and not authoritative in the field (Glesne, 2016).

In the subsequent sections we will discuss our role as researcher and analysis techniques.

Identity and Role of Researchers

Examining our roles in this study, we identified ourselves as insiders due to our positions at Mid-South University and Mid-South Regional campus. While we are not in regular contact with the interviewed administrative staff, we are employed in the environment as mentioned above. As Black Americans, we are first-generation college graduates and like the majority of transfer students, come from a low-income background. We identified with many of the academic and financial challenges of this population. These challenges that the transfer students encounter personally motivate us to advocate for an effective system for them as well. We believe that an effective system would be a tremendous step forward in securing the transfer of students' success.

As researchers, we kept reflexive journals of our values and interests found in our analysis of the conducted interviews (Glesne, 2016). We meticulously analyzed our recorded thoughts for any biases towards some of the participants' responses. We exchanged and shared in a reflexive dialogue to reveal and contest any hidden beliefs (Glesne, 2016) that would be present.

Coding Procedure

An open-ended coding process was followed according to a thematic analysis of the data from the interviews. In coding, our goals were to identify patterns in the interviews that

would address our research questions or say what it means to be a transfer student. Glesne (2016) distinguished two levels of themes: semantic and latent.

Semantic level themes analyze the data as written. The seven interviews were transcribed verbatim. Interview questions focused on what administrative staff thought about the interactions they had with transfer students, how they understood it and the extent to which they engaged transfer students at Mid-South University. The study received appropriate IRB approval. Before the interview, we submitted to a participant a “consent to participate in research” form. The participant was given ample time to read and ask questions if necessary, and only when ready to sign, approving the interview, did we proceed. The consent form covered the purpose, confidentiality, IRB approval, right to withdraw, and more for their information and protection.

All of those who participated in the interviews were given a copy of the “consent to participate in research” form once the interview was complete. Glesne (2016) provides us with a useful six-step guide for conducting a thematic analysis (see Table 2). First, we became familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts.

During this step, we made notes of our first impressions in the margins of the transcripts. In step two, we systemically organized our data. We reduced the data into smaller chunks of meaning.

We then coded each chunk that was relevant to our research question.

Then we used *open coding*, which means that we developed and modified the codes as we worked through the coding process (Glesne, 2016). Step three, we detailed and identified preliminary themes in each transcript.

During step four, we reviewed and improved the preliminary themes. We considered if the data connected to the themes would support our research question: what are administrative

staff perceptions of transfer students and Mid-South University's commitment to transfer students? In step five, we refined the themes together in search of a 'core' message. We used administrative staff language or quotes to help define themes. The overarching focus connected to our themes is adversity.

Step 1: Get to know the data Step 2: Preliminary codes Step 3: Search for themes	Step 4: Compare themes Step 5: Refine themes Step 6: Write-up
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Table 12: The six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Adapted from Glesne (2016) *'Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (Fifth ed.).'*

We enhanced our reliability by having both researchers code themes separately and increased validity through a dual comparison of our findings. This process provided a comprehensive analysis. Our findings coincided with the themes giving us confidence in having identified administrative staff perceptions as a factor in transfer student success.

FINDINGS

Transfer students experience more disadvantages than the traditional freshman. Transfer students' earned credits do not always transfer to the new institution. The new institution may not count the classes as acceptable or will typically have different requirements of their own. These requirements can force transfer students to retake classes or stay another semester, which means incurring additional student loans. Our study probes into the relationship between administrative staff and transfer student success. We found that, in general, administrative staff felt that students who assimilated socially and academically were more likely to succeed.

These aspects of student success are consistent with the vast majority of institutional goals, which include outcomes that are not strictly academic. The most frequently cited need for transfer students amongst interviewees is the quality of interpersonal relationships and campus

involvement. Another perceived issue mentioned by administrative staff is to transfer students' level of academic performance. In the following section, we look at the perceived academic challenges of transfer students according to administrative staff.

Academic Challenges

Student Advancement

Specifically, there are two types of academic challenges administrative staff discussed: (a) not being academically prepared and (b) not having STEM degree options at the regional campuses once they transfer. Administrative staffs mainly perceive community college courses easier than those taught at the four-year university level. Moreover, since not all credits are accepted, students transferring from one institution to another may experience transfer shock or a temporary dip in grade point average during their first semester. Thus, administrative staff believes transfer students to be ill prepared to attain a baccalaureate degree at Mid-South University.

Linda, a Financial Aid Advisor, states, "Two things here, one is the rigor of the classes [and] what's expected of you in [the] transition, and sometimes, they [transfer students] do not do well grade-wise. The only GPA that they have at the university is the first year. They do not have [or include] those two years of the easy classes [at the community college]."

Jake, an Academic Advisor at Mid-South University Regional, goes on to say, "Lot of them go to community college for academic or financial reasons and a lot of students who start at the community college would not have met freshman admission requirements at the traditional four-year college or other universities because they either didn't take that high school college prep curriculum or they didn't have a high-enough ACT score or high enough GPA."

The administrative staff comments suggest that they perceive community college courses

easier than those at MSU, and, consequently, transfer students are not prepared to advance academically.

Degree Options at Mid-South Regional

The second perceived academic challenge, according to administrative staff for transfer students is the available academic programs at Mid-South University Regional locations. Administrative staff states that the academic programs offered at regional locations are mostly traditional liberal art degrees, not science, technology, engineering, and math degrees – collectively known as STEM. Transfer students at the regional locations flock toward STEM degrees, as they are considered more valuable. Mid-South Regional serves a demographic that is older who increasingly see college as a means to an end: more money.

Heather, an Academic Director, says this: “ the type of student is different [at the Mid-South University Regional]. We [Mid-South University] get more of the traditional age for very obvious reasons.

The people who have families, jobs, and spouses with jobs are the older people who are more established in their lives, and they are going back [to college] for a particular reason. And not that people come to Mid-South University [traditional four-year university] are not, but most are young people trying to find their way, not re-directing or something else.

They [regional locations] have an idea that the students at Mid-South University [traditional four-year campus] have many, many more opportunities, and that is, in fact, true.”

Transfer students’ lack of STEM degree options at Mid-South University Regional locations is frustrating for both students and academic advisors, according to administrative staff. Jake, an Academic Advisor at Mid-South Regional, states, “Some degrees will not allow you to finish at the regional campus...curriculum requirements change without regard to how that

affects community college students who may have been on a curriculum path for the last two years. And oh, by the way, here's another class you have to take. And we don't offer it at the regional campus, so, good luck getting in. You have to drive [to another town], and it's only offered on Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. while you're working full-time job.... students who come to regional campus are generally place-bound students, either because of financial reasons or whatever else that's keeping them here.”

The choices transfer students at the Mid-South University Regional locations are making about their degree programs show that higher education for this demographic is more about securing employment.

Academic rigor, transfer shock, and limited degree programs at Mid-South University Regional are just a few of the challenges facing transfer students. Next, we explore how administrative staff perceives transfer students' social integration on campus.

Social Integration

Transfer students' first days on campus are a whirlwind of meeting new people, adjusting to campus and finding a community. Administrative staff at Mid-South University believes transfer students struggle to engage in activities outside the classroom due to social isolation and a lack of friends. Social integration represents the engagement students have to activities outside the classroom.

These activities are linked to the desired social development of students at institutions. Social development is the quality and depth of interpersonal relationships, leadership skills, and civic engagement. Institutions want aspects of the college experience to include interacting with peers, faculty, and staff substantively.

Many interviewees underscored the importance of involvement in persistence. That is,

administrative staff believe the more students develop connections outside the classroom, the more likely they are to stay and graduate. Heather, an Academic Director, states, “it is even more critical because they [transfer students] need to get involved immediately. They do not have time to waste...it’s the get it going, beyond going to class and going home, that makes a huge difference for the next step [persistence].”

Studies (e.g., Thiele, Pope, Singleton, Snape, & Stanistreet, 2017; Tinto, 1993) repeatedly show that transfer students are the first in their family to attend college, work while in school, and must navigate these social challenges without any form of support. Transfer students can feel isolated at a large school, with thousands of other students attending. Conversely, transfer students at Mid-South Regional might feel trapped by a smaller community and want a bigger campus. Irrespective of size, transfer students, according to administrative staff, often struggle alone with the process of learning the social dynamics of Mid-South University.

Linda says, “Sometimes, transfer students are a little on their own, and they may not be ready for that [social] responsibility. It does not mean you’re not mature. It does not mean you are not smart. It is just, maybe you did not know you’d have [to do] all this stuff by yourself, and where do you start? What if you are first-generation, and you do not know how?”

Outside of family, many first-generation transfer students are motivated and supported by friendships. However, friendships made during their freshman year at community college or elsewhere are gone because they are new to the university. The first year at Mid-South University for transfer students is a challenging time. Charlie, an Academic Program Director at Mid-South University, stated, “It is a transition, no matter how well you are prepared. When they first come to the university, they do not have a set of friends.”

Cathy, an Assistant Academic Director, who works closely with transfer students stated,

“The first year for transfer students is a make or break period. They are obviously coming from another institution, so the rules are different, the culture is different...you don’t know where your community exists and I imagine that all of those things in your first year are the most challenging because you just don’t have a specific resource center... a place to go and ask these questions. It is all different locations with all different people. Thus, there is not a contact.”

It is clear that the transition for transfer students is not only hard, but it is also lonely. Some administrative staff caution about whether the assumptions on which social integration is constructed apply more to full-time, traditional-age, and residential students, and less on students from historically underserved groups. We discuss in the next piece Mid-South University social integration practices and why transfer students may not be benefitting from engagement.

Validation

The transfer students’ experience of disorientation is visible to administrative staff. Feelings of alienation or lack of interpersonal connection between transfer students and the university community – peers, faculty, and administrative staff (Tinto, 1993) were acknowledged by administrative staff. However, university practices marginalize transfer students and fail to validate or recognize them as individuals that matter to the university.

Heather, an Academic Director at Mid-South University, states, “...it behooves Mid-South University as the numbers go up for us to not ignore the transfer students on our campus. However, instead, think about how we battle the reputations we have. And one of them that I have heard, over and over again, our recruiters tell me is that they also find... Mid-South University kids are white, snobby, and rich. And so, some transfer students fight their families as do some who are going to come here as freshman. Oh, and we are considered not transfer friendly either. I hear that over and over again... within the community college, advisors,

faculty, and students, and they talk to each other, that this is the place where it is difficult, harder to be successful here.”

Until recently, the dominant institutional philosophy was that the student had to adjust to the institution to succeed. As the transfer student population grows and because transfer students are so diverse, Mid-South University recognizes they must change to encourage a campus culture that welcomes and affirms historically underserved groups. Simply put, social integration is a two-way street. Both Mid-South University and transfer students have roles to play in creating appropriate conditions.

As Mid-South University administrative staff works to frame and brand themselves as desirable to transfer students, they also recognize the need for transfer student support. Heather adds, “...You have got to counter the narrative by getting positive, marketing information and stories, and data... you can do all three. And that means an E-newsletter to community colleges, faculty, advisors, and students. And it means: here is some new things at Mid-South University to get involved in.” In the following section, we discuss Mid-South University’s urgent need for consistent and expanded support services for transfer students. In the final section of this manuscript, we discuss the competing values at Mid-South University and the private good of social mobility that has eclipsed the university mission to increase access for students (Labaree, 1997).

Uneven Support and Financial Pressures Transcend Social Justice

Student services at Mid-South University acknowledge the need for a comprehensive approach to the success of transfer students. Implemented is an orientation class designed for transfer students. In these transfer courses, administrative staff collected and reviewed data about the effectiveness of transfer student policies and practices.

To address transfer student concerns a taskforce was created to improve the academic and social experience of transfer students. Soon after, a transfer student scholarship, online transfer equivalency database, and special housing was added to support transfer students. Yet, some of these services have been ineffective due to a lack of communication and progress is still needed in other areas.

Systemic problems with the online transfer equivalency database program remain. The reason for the structural issues is that there is no accountability and oversight of faculty for providing updates to the system.

David, a Support Service Director, states, "...transfer equivalency processing and processes are not effective...we do a terrible job with it. Everyone admits it. I think there is going to be some movement to improve that."

Administrative staff at Mid-South University Regional perceives these issues to be related to communication. Transfer students have lost credit because the academic advisor was unaware of department course changes. The transfer student then had to either retake community college courses at the university or take "filler" classes to create a schedule. Improving communication between the university and community college networks improves the efficiency of the overall transfer equivalency database.

Cathy, an Assistant Academic Director, says, "But you know, even three to five years ago, when we would give students a transfer equivalency report, it would say pending. So, when they came, we couldn't really tell them what they needed for their degree and that adds another layer of frustration. And the students would you know, potentially have to go talk to departments or go find a course syllabus and take it around and doing a lot of extra leg work... adding to the I'm not welcome at this university. You're not even prepared for me. And you've

known that I coming for months now.”

Mid-South Regional administrative staff expresses frustration in communicating with Mid-South University about the transfer equivalency database as well. Vicky, an Academic Advisor at Mid-South Regional, added, “...it would be nice if we had better communication between us and the central campus. Just as far as ...you know, because they don’t really, the central campus...I mean they do have transfers, of course, but they’re not dealing only with transfers, like us. So, the process for them could be smoother than what it is and especially as far as, like, getting their coursework equated quickly so that we can see it. Because sometimes, you know, students are coming in and their coursework is inadequate. We don’t, you know...we have to try to generically try to place where those courses are going to fit. So, in my opinion, that would make it a lot smoother.” Another challenge is communicating the difference in university and community college policies. The rules around transfer student drop and withdraw dates can be different in procedure. Cathy, stated, “A student can only withdraw in a case extreme or unavoidable emergency. If you’re not doing well in your class, it’s not a reason to withdraw according to the university’s policy, but the community colleges in the State allows you to withdraw up until the last day. So, students have had sort of have this idea, yeah, that environment where if they’re not doing well, they don’t have expiration. They can go in right before the class ends and make a withdrawal and there’s no penalty.”

In response to these misunderstandings, Cathy began to communicate with transfer students by email. Cathy, says, “...we started this last year is that we go through when we learn that a student is coming for transfer orientation, our office, our counselors, go through and we do an evaluation of their work and then we draft a welcome email for them and we say, “Welcome to Mid-South University, we are so excited that you are coming.”

Mid-South University can identify the inefficiencies in their support but struggle with figuring out a solution. It is possible in some cases to resolve an issue by communicating directly with transfer students, but how will the university scale up as the transfer student population grows. When Cathy was asked, “What do you think the university needs to do better to help transfer students?”, she stated, “ I wish I knew the answer.... if I knew the band-aid fix....if I knew exactly what could be done....I don’t know, but I do think that one thing we could do with almost no effort is to find a way to show transfer students that they are important...that they matter.” When asked about the progress of transfer student support, one recommendation mentioned several times by administrative staff was to create a transfer center or a ‘one-stop-shop’. A transfer center according to administrative staff would answer a variety of questions and concerns about Mid-South University and provide support for meeting those increased academic challenges.

Heather, an Academic Director, states, “We [taskforce] have implemented some of those things [transfer student services]. We [taskforce] have, but the main one we did not, which was the Transfer Student Center. We need a Transfer Student Center. That is the main thing we can do.” David, a Support Service Director, added, “We need transfer advisors, academic advisors that understand the courses that they’ve taken at, wherever they’ve come from and know how to put those into our [transfer equivalency] database and, so forth.”

A transfer center for administrative staff means they can centralize issues surrounding the transfer equivalency database, explaining the difference between policies and procedures of the university and the community college, and improving communication with Mid-South University’s Regional campus.

Mid-South University’s attempt to create comprehensive institutional change when it

comes to transfer students is familiar to those in the field of higher education. The changing demographics of students has accelerated the need for administrative staff to provide an effective strategy that will help guide institutional adjustment. So far, Mid-South University strategies have been uneven in their support of transfer students. One possible reason for this is financial. Financial here is twofold: financial pressure to retain transfer students with no financial support from Mid-South University.

According to administrative staff, Mid-South University new student enrollment goals are met by replacing students who leave after the first or second year with transfer students. David, a Support Service Director, states, “It’s only been in the last, I would say, eight to ten years that we’ve gotten really serious about transfer students in terms of what we do for them on the central campus.” When asked, “Why do you think that is?” David followed with, “Because it is a reality. We need ... the university needs those students. We’re dependent on those students.” Trying to retain students after cutbacks in state funding has forced steep tuition hikes, which further tilt Mid-South University towards retention of transfer students.

Linda, A financial aid advisor at Mid-South University stated, “We often have meetings where we will sit and talk about recruitment and retention issues where the directors will come and ... just kind of do some planning. What changes do we want to make to maximize those things we want: to keep the numbers up with recruitment; bring in good students. We want to have a new freshman transfer class that’s vital and ready to go; but, we also want to make sure that we’re able to retain those students and that they make it to graduation, that’s the ultimate goal. So, we have to try and figure out how to balance those things and where to put your efforts.”

Many administrative staff find it difficult to retain transfer students and not be able to

financially support them in the same way they do other students. Administrative staff note transfer students difficulty in managing finances, school and their personal life. David, states, “It was obvious after we started getting transfer students in some numbers that they were succeeding at a lesser rate than our non-transfer students, those that began as freshman... in all metrics, retention rate, GPA, all across the board.”

David added that he thought the lack of financial support by Mid-South University had to do with the constant shift in leadership. David, said, “... the timing on this [report] was horrible. Our chancellor was just relieved of his duties. So we’re [Mid-South University] going through a [chancellor] search. The campus is kind of up in arms. Lot of faculty doesn’t like how it [chancellor departure] was all handled. We were appointed an acting chancellor, who was an incredible, effective provost. We deliver the report to him and the vice chancellor for student affairs. One month later, we get a new chancellor. The acting chancellor reverts back to being provost, but announces his retirement, so he’s a lame duck. He’s agreed to serve one year to help with the transition [of the chancellor] and so our recommendation gets stuck in limbo because he’s going to wait for the next provost to act on it.” Navigating organizational change is difficult without consistent leadership. Well-thought-out planning and implementation by the transfer student taskforce was designed to minimize attrition but failed because of changes in leadership and a lack of financial support.

Triggered by tough economic times, Mid-South University is dependent on transfer students to help its bottom line. Seeking to maximize revenues, university staff recruits transfer students to attend Mid-South University who, administrative staff knows, will likely not graduate and suffer financially as a consequence.

Though, administrative staff reaffirms its mission to increase access and opportunities for

transfer students at the four-year level, without dedicated support from the highest levels of administrative and faculty leadership at Mid-South University, they will continue to maintain the status quo.

Conclusion

The national conversation around the transfer gap has drawn plenty of attention as an increasing number of students attend community college. Transfer credits not accepted by universities mean higher costs and additional time spent earning a bachelor's degree for transfer students compared to those who enter directly out of high school. Seven interviews with administrative staff captured their attitudes toward transfer students at Mid-South University (see Figure 1). Administrative staff perceives transfer students as unprepared academically. Likewise, they express concern with the limited degree options and available STEM courses at the regional locations. Transfer students are socially isolated at Mid-South University, according to administrative staff. They attribute this to a lack of dedicated social programming. Finally, administrative staff said that the online transfer equivalency database program is unreliable, forcing some students to take classes they may not need.



Figure 2.0 Administrative Staff Perceptions of Transfer Students

Mid-South University formed a task force that reported issues such as these to higher levels of leadership. However, significant fluctuations in leadership have left transfer student recommendations not yet implemented. A transfer center or one-stop-shop is said by several interviewees to resolve many of the academic and social woes of transfer students.

Administrative staffs are now in a difficult situation in which they are to retain transfer students with limited support services. The next part of our study will examine how the enactment theory and critical race theory support our analysis of administrative staff perceptions of transfer student success (Parker, 2015; Hiraldo, 2010). Then we note the limitations of our theoretical framework followed up with suggestions for further research.

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MANUSCRIPT THREE

The Current Study

Attaining a higher education in society today is usually a secured pathway to ensuring that one will enjoy the financial and social rewards in life. The importance of higher education is not only beneficial for the individual obtaining a bachelor's degree but for the community and country to which they live. As current practitioners in higher education who frequently interact with transfer students and have experience as former transfer students, the decision to study this community of higher education in depth was the right choice for us to make.

More than one-third of college students move from one college to another at least once in their academic careers, and more academic institutions are counting on these transfer students to fill their classes when non-transfers do not (Lederman, 2017). Despite the increasing reliance on transfer students, they have not been well served by institutions (Lederman, 2017), two-year and four-year alike.

The transition from one institution to another is not always smooth. A student's decision to transfer produces additional expenses and time spent attaining a baccalaureate degree (Panfil, 2012). This delay in attaining the baccalaureate degree is described as the baccalaureate attainment gap or transfer gap (Dougherty, 1992).

We analyze whether institutional factors within the organization environment of higher education are unfavorable for transfer students and actually increase the transfer gap. We evaluate this argument by concentrating on two institutional factors. We conducted our research at a university in the Mid-South region of the United States. The name of the actual campus has been changed to protect its anonymity: Mid-South University. Mid-South University and its

regional locations are referred to with slight variations to their names throughout this study such as MSU central campus for Mid-South University and MSU regional locations for Mid-South University transfer centers

We narrowed the institutional factors down to selected outcomes for transfer students and administrative staff perceptions about transfer student success. The selected outcomes for transfer students at Mid-South University focus specifically on graduation rates and retention rates. We compared the two, four, and six-year graduation rates to establish data that can be analyzed for institutional effectiveness. Mid-South University Institutional Research and Effectiveness, and Planning Office substantiated the quantitative data in this study.

Mid-South University administrative staff perceptions regarding transfer student success were gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews. All seven of the MSU administrative staff were solicited through email invitation, and all corresponded with a reply of willingness to be interviewed. These seven administrative staff provided specific details of their interactions and opinions of transfer student success. Transcripts of these recorded interviews revealed collective shared assumptions or perceptions about transfer student success.

Summary of Findings

The quantitative data in this study (see Table 1, 2, and 3) shows graduation rates for all MSU campus transfer students. We review the MSU central campus, regional locations, and combine campus statistics using distinct transfer student cohorts.

MSU 2-Year Graduation Rates For Transfer Students on All Campuses

Table 13

MSU 2-Year Graduation Rates Averages for Transfer Student Cohorts of 2010 to 2016

Campus	Average
Central Campus	25.0%
Regional Locations	42.8%
Combined Campuses	34.9%

Note. The 2-year transfer graduation rates were collected from seven cohorts

This average shows a 17.8% difference in graduation rates between MSU central campus and regional locations, with the regional locations leading in the 2-year graduation rates for transfer students across all MSU campuses. The 2-year graduations display the transfer of students from the point of entry at the Mid-South University. This point of entry does not compute the transfer course credits of the transfer students. Therefore, 2-year graduation rates are skewed because students at the regional campuses have often but not always completed their associate degree or have two years of credit toward their bachelor's degree. Consequently, this chart should display the regional campus transfer students with higher 2-year graduation rates than the transfers on the central and combined campuses.

MSU 2-Year Graduation Rates For Transfer Students on All Campuses

Table 14

MSU 4-Year Graduation Rates for Transfer Student Cohorts of 2008- to 2014

Campus	Average
Central Campus	59.8%
Regional Locations	64.4%
Combined Campuses	64.0%

Note. The 4-year transfer graduation rates were collected from seven cohorts.

The statistics show that, on average, the regional locations 4-year graduation rates are higher than the central campus by 4.2%. The 4-year graduations display the transfer of students

from the point of entry at the Mid-South University. This point of entry does not calculate the transfer course credits of the transfer students. Therefore, the 4-year graduation rates are skewed because students at the regional campuses have often but not always completed their associate degree or have two years toward their bachelor's degree. Consequently, this chart should display the regional campus with higher 4-year transfer graduation rates than the central and combined campuses transfer students.

MSU 6-Year transfer Graduation Rates (Includes 4-year Graduation rates)

Table 15

MSU 6-Year Graduation Rates

Student Cohorts	Campus	Average
Freshman Student of 2006 to 2012	Central Campus	60.8%
Transfer Student of 2007 to 2012	Regional Locations	66.46%
Transfer Student of 2007 to 2012	Combined Campuses	65.7%

Note. The 6-year graduation rates include 4 year-graduation rates.

We cannot compare 6-year graduation rates because our data represents different cohorts years. However, we can see a pattern from Table 1 and Table 2 that averages are higher when regional locations are inclusive in the data. The regional campus transfers often include an associate degree or up to two years of transferable coursework credit, which are inclusive in the six-year graduation rate in which they mostly have already graduated.

Next, we evaluate retention rates (see Table 4) for transfer students at MSU. Our study reviews transfer students who entered during a fall semester and were retained to the following spring semester.

MSU Transfer Retention Rates

Table 16
MSU Transfer Student Retention Rates

Student Cohorts	Campus	Average
1 st Sem. full-time new transfer student 2009 to 2017	Combined Campuses	87.8%
2 nd Year full-time new transfer student 2009 to 2017	Combined Campuses	74.9%
3 rd Year full-time new transfer student 2008 to 2016	Combined Campuses	36.0%

Note. The transfer retention rates were collected from nine cohorts.

The statistics show that on average first-year transfer students are retained at a higher rate than the second-year transfer student. We cannot compare the third-year transfer student retention rates because that data represents different cohort years. Albeit the one-year distinction between cohorts, the retention rates drop by 38.9%, which is expected due to the point of entry of regional campus transfer students. The regional campus transfer students began MSU with an associate or 2-years of academic credits, which allow them to graduate earlier. The 3rd year cohort retention calculation does not include numerous regional campus transfer students.

According to qualitative interviews conducted with MSU administrative staff, transfer students are unlikely to achieve success right away at the 4-year level. Reasons, according to the administrative staff is that transfer students are hindered due to:

1. MSU is not a transfer receptive environment.
2. MSU does not validate or acknowledge transfer students in a socially significant way.

Linking Study Findings to Theory and Research

The theoretical framework applied to the quantitative study is the Student Departure Theory by Vincent Tinto. Tinto (1993; Connolly, 2016) identifies three major sources of student departure: (a) academic difficulties, (b) the inability of individuals to resolve their educational

and occupational goals, and (c) their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution.

While the data exhibited does not explicitly show us why transfer students stopped out or quit, what we can see is a pattern of transfer student success that is greater at MSU regional locations. Furthermore, MSU retains transfer students on average better in their first-year than in the second-year. The MSU regional campus student population varies from non-traditional students who are returning to complete their bachelor's degree for advancement in their current job or to begin a new career. Also, there are traditional transfer students who are completing a 4-year degree to begin pursuing their first career in employment.

The theoretical framework used in the qualitative study is the Enactment Theory (Weick, 1995) and the Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Hiraldo, 2010). The Enactment Theory surmises that members of an organization, based on shared assumptions or perceptions about reality, collaborate to control or avoid certain issues in the organizational environment. There are two tenets in the Enactment Theory. First, members bring to the organization perceptions about reality. In this study, we consider this to be the members' perceptions of transfer student success. Secondly, members of an organization are shared; assumptions are embedded, but patterns of thinking become permanent and noticeable at which time members collaborate.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) views race, a socially constructed concept as a means of maintaining the interest of the white population that constructed it. CRT tenets were incorporated to help describe the basis of organizational members' perceptions and collaboration to control issues within the organizational environment.

The five tenets of CRT are:

1. Counter Storytelling

2. Permanence of Racism

3. Whiteness as Property

4. Interest – Conversion

This study's findings aligned with two of the CRT's tenets: (1) counter storytelling and (4) interest – conversion. The other tenets did not align directly with race but did with regard to the social class of transfer students. Administrative Staff interviewed in this study also lacked the authority to control or avoid transfer student success issues within the organizational environment.

Interviewed MSU administrative staff perceived transfer student success in various but similar ways. Their patterns of thinking were that transfer students are not well equipped to succeed at Mid-South University initially. The names of interviewees were changed to protect their anonymity.

Heather an MSU Academic Director, said: “ The type of student [transfer] is different. We [MSU Central Campus] get more of the traditional age for very obvious reasons. The people who have families, jobs, spouses with jobs, are older people who are more established in their lives and they're going back [to college] for a particular reason. They [MSU regional locations] have an idea that the students at Mid-South University [MSU Central campus] have many, many more opportunities and that's, in fact, true.”

One example of what Heather is talking about is the lack of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) degree options at the MSU regional locations. In fact, a majority of interviewees believed that more STEM degree options should be made available at MSU regional locations.

Three of the study participant statements were reflective of the second tenet in the Enactment Theory. The patterns of thinking by these members about transfer student success were noticeable. Participants discussed transfer students' academic preparedness, social integration, and a need for a transfer center.

Linda, a Financial Aid Advisor at Mid-South University stated, "We often have meetings where we will sit and talk about recruitment and retention issues where the directors will come and just kind of do some planning. What changes do we want to make... to maximize those things we want... to keep the numbers up with recruitment... to bring in good students? We want to have a new freshman transfer class that's vital and ready to go; but, we also want to make sure that we're able to retain those students and that they make it to graduation. That's the ultimate goal. So we have to try and figure out how to balance those things and where to put your [our] efforts."

Heather, MSU Academic Director, explicitly talked about having a transfer student center. "We [MSU Taskforce] have implemented some [MSU Taskforce goals] of those things." We [MSU Taskforce] have... but, the main one; we did not, which is the Transfer Student Center. We need a Transfer Student Center. That is the main thing we can do."

Cathy, an Assistant Academic Director, stated: "The first-year for transfer students is a make or break period of time. They're obviously coming from another institution, so the rules are different, the culture is different... you don't know where your community exists and I image that all of those things in your first-year are the most challenging because you don't have a specific resource center... a place to go and ask these questions. It's all different locations with all different people, and so, there's not really a contact."

Limitations of Study

The limitations to this study are not detrimental to its quality. The findings of this study are noteworthy and point to a means of improving the system of higher education to benefit transfer students.

One limitation is the retention data collection for transfer students. At the time of our data collection, Mid-South University did not collect retention rates from its regional locations. A statistician (Anonymous, personal communication, Feb. 7th, 2019), who collects data for public institutions of higher education in the same State as Mid-South University, confirmed that transfer student data is not collected statewide.

Not having this data affects pertinent information related to the retention and demographics for first-time full-time transfer students. Placing more emphasis on collecting these specific transfer statistics at the state and university level will allow a comparison concerning transfer students statistically on a national level. Even more so there will be a better understanding of what resources the institutions need to enhance transfer student success. State policymakers of this mid-south state do not make it mandatory to track retention rates for transfer students at 4-year institutions, therefore, it will remain difficult for Mid-South University to track transfer student success.

The qualitative study is limited in transferability and trustworthiness due to the low number of participants. Two of the participants' responses were limited with regard to relevance of the study. Consequently the results are not generalizable. Three of the seven participants were part of the MSU Transfer Student Taskforce Committee (2014) that proposed transfer student initiatives and their responses could impact the results of the study.

Another weakness is the interpretation of results, which can be bias because it is influenced by the researcher's perspective. Steps were taken however, to maintain objectivity and avoid bias. We used multiple people to code the data, had participants review our results, and had our advisors review our findings.

Future Research and Recommendations

Future research needs to reflect more of the challenges facing the college student of today (see Figure 1). Today's college students (Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation, 2019) come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring an equally diverse set of needs. Among college students today, nearly half (40 percent) are 25 or older—returning to advance their career (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019) or to re-train for a new opportunity. Many students hold full-time jobs while enrolled in classes, one quarter are parents, and many are the first in their family to attend college.

Many transfer students qualify for financial aid at Mid-South University, but they sometimes run into obstacles understanding the process. The community colleges give free assistance in applying for financial aid. Once the transfer student transfers to the 4-year institution, they do not receive the same hands-on financial aid assistance.

If a transfer student fails to notify FASFA that they transferred to another institution this will cause a delay in financial aid for tuition and books. This disruption can cause the student to drop out during their first semester at the 4-year university. Transfer students usually work a full-time job and support their dependents and pay for housing. Therefore transfer students need part-time school hours, hybrid, or online courses. MSU does not offer weekend undergraduate classes or many hybrid and online courses. We recommend MSU consider weekend classes or hybrid courses.

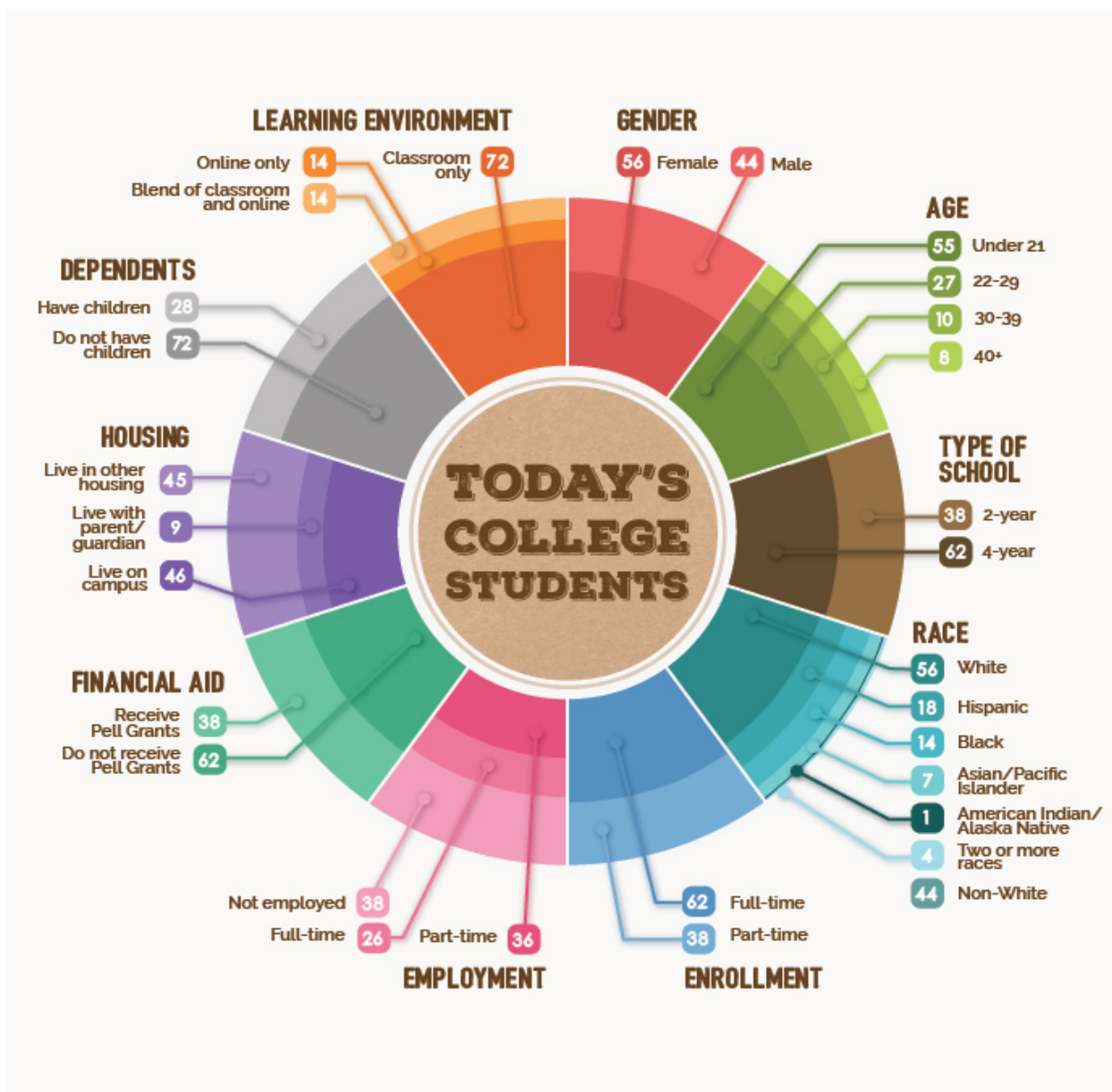


Figure 3.0 The Changing Face of U.S. Higher Education, (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2019)

A lack of resources available to transfer students is a challenge (see Table 5) to transfer student success as well. The regional locations resources are limited. One can begin to see the

parallels of institutional support for both the first-year transfer student that enters a MSU regional location as a junior, and the first-year freshman that enters MSU central campus.

All full-time first-year new transfer students will have access to orientation and mandatory academic advising. However, resource (see Table 6) offices are housed on MSU central campus and are open from 9:00am to 5:00pm. Many transfer students' work and may not be able to available until after 5:00pm.

MSU Resources for First-Year Students on Central and Regional Campus

Table 17

MSU Resources for First-Year Students

Central Campus	Regional Campuses
New Transfer Orientation	New Transfer Orientation
Transfer Academic Advising	Transfer Academic Advising
Transfer Student Experience Course	Transfer Student Experience Course
Scholarships for Transfer Students	Scholarships for Transfer Students
Writing Center	Not All Regional Locations have Writing Ctrs.
Counseling Center	Online Only
Clubs and Organizations	Clubs and Organizations
Onsite Library and Bookstore	Online Only
Student Health and Recreation	Not Available
Dining Services	Not Available
Testing Center	Testing Center

Note. Resources that are accessible to the MSU central campus transfer students and transfer students attending a MSU regional location.

If Resource Offices were available on regional locations for transfer students during the evening and/or weekends, MSU could help more transfer students. There are many students who graduate with an associate degree that do not attend a 4-year university (Patton, 2017) because of the availability of the Resource Offices. We recommend extended office hours for those students that work.

MSU Resource Offices on Central Offices

Table 18

MSU Resource Offices

Financial Aid
Disability Support
Housing
Academic Advising
Admissions
Registrar
Travel Abroad
Career Center

Note. These Resource Offices are available to students face-to-face on MSU Central campus 8:00am-5:00pm and online, they are accessible by phone or email for MSU regional locations.

MSU has taken the critical first step recommended by scholars Poisel and Joseph (2018) in creating an intentional focus on transfer students by building an institution-specific transfer profile. MSU Transfer Student Taskforce (2014), through expertise and research, recommends a transfer student center. The MSU central campus has a first-year student center for incoming first-year students. We recommend that MSU include a transfer office to help serve first-year transfer students on MSU central campus.

Next, MSU must determine the roles that transfer students' play concerning university access, enrollment, completion, and service to the community (Poisel & Joseph, 2018, p. 132).

Finally, the definition of transfer students is evolving, and we need to be mindful that new subpopulations of students will emerge (Poisel & Joseph, 2018). Scholars Poisel & Joseph (2018, p. 133) offer five strategies to help rethink the importance of transfer students and to prioritize the success of transfer students:

1. Ensure that various types of transfer and the associate academic path inform institutional strategic planning efforts.
2. Document student success and tell the story of transfer students through data analysis.

3. Develop and create meaningful partnerships on campus, in the community, and at the state level to focus on access and student mobility.
4. Build program initiatives to support the changing needs of transfer students and increase their completion rate.
5. Expand orientation and advising to ensure that a single one-size-fits all program is not used for the transfer population.

Conclusion

The findings from the study are consistent with the literature on transfer students. Transfer students lack the knowledge and understanding of the university's higher education system. MSU transfer student retention and interviews with MSU administrative staff confirm these findings. We recognized the invaluable work administrative staff members at Mid-South University have done thus far. Transfer students' needs are vast and complicated. Ensuring transfer of student success has an evolving nature. The implementation of the transfer equivalency database and orientation course at MSU is a good start. To increase transfer student success our efforts must be decisively transfer focused and supported by top leadership at MSU.

The purpose of this study was to determine if institutional factors such as transfer student graduation rates, transfer student retention rates, and administrative staff perceptions of transfer student success effect transfer student success at Mid-South University. We found that MSU Regional locations have a higher graduation rate than MSU Central Campus. Interviews suggest that MSU regional locations are specialized to fit the needs of transfer students. Regional locations largely serve transfer students and therefore address the needs of these students differently.

Research on transfer student success (Conolly, 2016) has focused mainly on student advancement, social integration, and transfer student perceptions. Investigating the diverse causes and processes upon transfer students from an administrative point of view is what we established. The findings in this study will add to the existing body of literature in higher education that focuses on the psychological and socio-political structures that coexist along with administrative staff decision-making. The results of this study are useful to students, parents, faculty, and other higher education practitioners.

CPED REFLECTION

Compelled by the persistence of the transfer gap, we conducted this study to bring attention to the inequality at Mid-South University for transfer students. We are driven by a desire to correct unethical behavior in higher education. Regardless of transfer student social class, gender, ethnicity, physical, and mental disabilities, we aspire to provide equal support services for all college students. Equal support in higher education means success for transfer students. It also means help for our community. Educating transfer students is essential for the growth of our communities and country. Through education, we bring mental, physical, political, and economic advantage to all.

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